My Writing My Times

Kishori Charan Das

My writing, My Times

(A collection of some talks delivered and articles published on literature , in India and abroad)

Kishori Charan Das

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LINK ROAD, CUTTACK-12

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My writing, My times

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Published by :

Arya Prakashan

Link Road, Cuttack - 753012

Orissa, India.

First edition 1997

ISBN - 81 - 7412 - 072 - 6

Printed at :

Sri Jagannath Laminator & Offset Printer

Badambadi, Cuttack -12

Cover design

Swaha Mishra

Price : Rs. 90/-

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To a dear friend
and eminent scholar
Prof. Bidhubhusan Das

With affection and regards.

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Preface

"My writing, My Times", was the topic of a discourse in a large all-India gathering of writers held recently, in Alwaye, Kerala, in which I too had said my piece and unburdened myself of my woes. But, broadly speaking, the theme runs through almost all the talks and articles that find a place in this volume - a selection from my literary engagements in India and abroad over the last two decades. For even though I have been faithful to the facts of literary history, whenever indicated, it has been my own way of looking at life and myself which I have tried to project in my writings (or have failed to do so) that forms the tone and tenor of this volume. Perhaps it is an indulgence I have arrogated to myself as a writer. But I do hope it will still be of interest to my readers, and strike a chord of sympathy, sometimes, in their minds and hearts.

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Introductory Notes on the Contents

1. *Literature and Cultural Identity*

Paper read by the author on 11th March 1980 at a seminar at the International writers' week held at Adelaide, Australia on the above subject. The author was sponsored by the 'Indian Council of Cultural Relations New Delhi, to represent India in the seminar. The discourse was published in "Westerley' journal of the University of Western Australia, Perth; and later in "The Literary Criterion" journal of "Dhvanyaloka" Mysore, in its Issue of Vol XVI, no 1, 1981.

2. *My Exercises in Freedom*

Talk delivered by the author on 2nd October 1989 at a literary meet organized by the Department of Asiatic Studies, University of British Columbia, Vancouver Bc. Canada, at the University premises.

3. *National Unity and Integrity in India Literature*

Paper read at a state-level literary meet organised by "Lekhaka Sammukhya" , Bhubaneswar, on the above subject on 15th June 1983, at Bhubaneswar.

4. *The Inside Story: an Introduction.*

An article on the creative process written by the author from his own experience. Published under the title "Shaping a short story" in "Indian Literature", journal of the Central Sahitya Akademi in its Issue of Vol XXX, No 4, July-Aug 1986. Also published as an Introduction to the author's collection of short stories, " The Midnight Moon and other Stories", published by the B.R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi, in 1993.

5. *The Oriya Short Story*

Article published in "Orissa, Past and Present", Commemoration volume on the occasion of the first "Vishwa Oriya sammilani", held in 1992.

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6. *Autonomy of Literature*

Paper read at an all-India seminar on the above subject organised by the Indian Writers' Association at Calcutta on 1st March 1992.

7. *The relevance of form and style in the modern short story.*

Talk delivered at a Hindi - Oriya bipartisan literary seminar held held under the auspices of "Sempratik", Bhubaneswar, on 10th December 1994, in New Delhi.

8. *Who's afraid of the 21st Century ?*

Talk delivered at the Dept of English, Utkal University, Vani Vihar, Bhubaneswar in 1986, and later published in their journal "Journal of literary studies" in its Issue of Vol 10, No 2, 1987.

9. *Bankim Chandra's influence on Oriya Literature.*

Paper read at a National Seminar held under the auspices of the Asiatic society, Calcutta, on the above subject, on 8th December 1994 at Calcutta, to observe the death centenary of Bankim Chandra. Also published in "Revaluations", a literary journal published from Bhubaneswar in its first Issue of Vol I, Writer 1995.

10. *Towards Perceptions of an unreal word*

Paper read at a state-level seminar on "Gandhi's vision of Man - cultural elements in Education", organised by the Dept of Culture. Govt of Orissa, and held at Bhubaneswar on 30th Sept 1995 to commemorate the 125th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.

11. *My Writing, My Times*

Paper read at on all -India literary conference on the above subject under the auspices of "Surabhi" a literary organization, held at Alwaye, Kerala on 17th Sept 1994. It was attended by about 150 writers and literatures from all over India in a three-day programme named "Manasotsav 1994".

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LITERATURE AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

How I see myself and my writing in relation to the country I live in.

(A personal statement)

Why anybody writes is a question that he has to answer for himself, and normally he would like to revise his answer for the umpteenth time because he does not really know. He is painfully conscious of the fact that he cannot truthfully probe into his own impulses and motivations, irrespective of the great wonders he may achieve with the poor characters he presumes to create. There is bound to be a dense area of darkness in the relationship of a writer to himself, in spite of the resultant charm of a poem or story or whatever. It could be a relationship of some love, more hate; more love, some hate; an attempt to overcome complexes including the inferiority complex as the psychoanalyst Adler and his tribe would have him believe; a pitiful attempt to score against nothingness as the existentialists would say; or the absurd wish to do the miming act, to go on creating and duplicating the world he does not understand as the writer-philosophers of the Absurd School have been telling him. It could be one or more of these things. He would not know. He should be sure nevertheless of one incontrovertible fact. It is an active and vibrant relationship. A writer writes because he must. 'No writer can be a nihilist as even Camus says, `the very act of writing is. an affirmation'.

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Now, if we concede that writing is a positive exercise of the mind mated to self (which would cover the entire gamut of experience given to self), we may well be vague about the origins, legitimacy, or virtue of the exercise, but can we leave out of reckoning the end-user of the product, namely the intelligent reader ? And the intelligent reader of my literature is necessarily my countryman. Thus the creative process unless it is designed to produce goods 'not for sale', meaning that a creator wishes to be left severely alone, cannot but make a patriot of every writer, whether he likes it or not. In other words, the theme of this discourse has got to take on an added dimension, as an integral element in the premise, namely, that not only I have to see myself in a certain relation to the country I live in, it has to be a relationship of respect, if not love. In writing,-leaving aside the psychic motivations - I must not only relate myself to my customer; it is proper that I should help him, humour him and try to love him.

Let it not be misconstrued that I am taking an amoral position, when I say that patriotism in the broadest sense of the term is of no intrinsic importance in creative writing. I wish to say that even If I take such a position I cannot possibly maintain it, for practical reasons.

It follows that there are three levels, not mutually exclusive, at which a writer must operate. As the fundamental man he does not belongs to any country but shares certain anxieties, including death, common to the human race. Within the bounds of these anxieties each writer is unique and free. But since he belongs a certain environment he cannot entirely break away from it. While I do not subscribe to the theory that all thought is a bye-product of the social environment, there is no denying that the glory of the fundamental man does get coloured, if not diluted by the fact of his being at a certain place at a certain time in history. Henry Lawson operating outside Australia and the late nineteenth century could still perhaps have been a powerful writer, but the

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tonal quality and the thought- content of his works would have been entirely different. The same could be said for the Indian greats from Kalidas to Rabindranth Tagore. Thirdly, as the wish to communicate is very nearly a compulsion, a shade less than the wish to write, the writer cannot afford to ignore his compatriot, the familiar non-exciting brother of his daily living who is closest to him at the receiving end.

And so as a writer who believes in the validity of literature in relation to the inner man, I would yet declare unhesitatingly that I do relate to my country in more ways than one. I have a suspicion that I love her more than I care to admit, but that is a different matter.

To start with, I am conscious of the fact that the country, I live in, is far too big in the dimensions both of time and space. I am heir to a continuum of several thousand years of civilisation. I am one among six hundred thirty millions of people. The space I inhabit forms part of three million square miles of land and water. This consciousness works within me, and, not unoften, I feel inhibited. I am not vain enough to imagine that I could ever bring the entire works to bear upon my literature. Nevertheless there is a feeling of inadequacy, the Lilliputian feeling of scratching the tiny bit of a surface, and of not being able to relate to the giant of my love and honour. Sometimes I wonder whether my preference for the microcosmic canvas of a short story or the quintessential statement of poem is because I have not been able to relate properly to my country, whether I have been content with nibblings because her personality is beyond me. This is a personal confession which may not be shared by many Indian writers and rightly so, because there is no dearth in India of novels and long poems of merit which are truly macrocosmic. Yet every Indian writer of integrity will have to admit that the 'bigness' of the country has had a distinct influence on his writing process. The craving for an identity not easily attained could lead one to make deliberate and sustained efforts to enlarge the area of

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experience. It could prompt another to writer breathlessly, as much as possible, in an effort, as it were, to exhaust the slice of experience given to him. Yet another may have imbibed the idea of bigness conceptually, and that is how you find his characters in such heroic and tragic dimensions when most of the Western world considers that the modern man is a puny miserable thing who represents neither God nor Devil on earth. I am apt to believe that some of our contemporary writers, such as the novelist Gopinath Mohanty coming from my part of the country and winner of the highest literary award would not have created characters larger than life, if they had been elsewhere where the background would not have loomed so large, asking them sedulously to paint with big, bold and confident strokes. Each to his own measure of identity with a country that could well have been a continent.

Next, the bewildering diversity of life contained within the defined limits of my land. The magnitude by itself could not have been so overwhelming if it were homogeneous. But it is not so. A writer craving for identity with each and all that is significant may well be beaten back to his den, dazed by the infra-reds of the many-coloured glass. There are fourteen major languages each having a distinct literary tradition over many centuries, apart from the English language which has grown to be a notable medium of literary expression. Successive races of men have arrived to stay and have helped to create complex cross-fertilised cultures. All the major religions are here, each lending its own bias of conformity and departure, with reference to the demands of an atomic age. It is important to remember in this context that we are not merely a secular state, we do not wish the image to be tarnished in any shape or manner. That makes for a burgeoning of socio-cultural modes and impulses, which is left well alone. Fine-where does it leave the writer ? Should I eschew my ambitions and stick to my own area of knowledge-cum-experience ? That is a sensible but not a very welcome proposition. I am not being

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ambitious, I tell myself, when I wish to project the life of my next-door dark-skinned neighbour in Delhi who hails from the South whereas I am from Orissa in the East, and who is a practising Christian whereas I am an agnostic Hindu. We are both civil servants who take the bus-ride together to our respective offices, and belong to the so-called bourgeoise class. We talk for hours in English over the latest political situation, but we cannot, really commune. I do not know enough of the man in his own socio-cultural milieu, the rites of life and death in his family which carry poignancies foreign to me, the patterns of thought imposed on him by his own racial unconscious, in short, the entire intimate man whom I would have wished to come alive in my literature. I am not being ambitious when I wish to give a meaning to the fumes and flavours coming from his dwelling which tease me at odd evenings. Here, mind you, I am referring to an urban situation, and cities are known to be levellers, whereas my city would appear to be court house of Kafka's 'Trial' where 'people drift in and out of the lobbies together, but there's not much conversation' and 'each case is judged on its own merits'. It is also a fact that we writers belong mostly to towns and cities such as this. So the cultural diversity of the kind I have in my country, adds in no small measure to my sense of inadequacy as a writer. But by the same token it impels me, I hope it does, to in-depth exercises in understanding. The area, I am familiar with, is much too confining and at the same time I would hate to beguile the reader with a sense of the exotic concerning my neighbour, a device best left to foreigners writing about India. I must bear the cross, the best I can.

Yes, writing about those others by your side and around you is an adventure, as perhaps in no other country. Inadequacy can always be a stimulant so long as you can reasonably hope to overcome by inches, if not miles, the otherness of your brother. But how do you accept a situation in which the neighbour intrudes on your awareness, like nobody's business, and is yet not a

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brother ? You cannot wish him away, for his number is legion. In a city, he could indeed by your closest neighbour living in an enclosure of reeds and rags. He is a constant presence in the footpaths, when you are looking for the latest play of Samuel Beckett or his Indian counterparts. And when you go out of the city to enjoy a bit of Nature you see him, less miserable but no less different, ploughing the God's little acre given to him with a pair of bullocks, interminably, as it were, in a cosmic monotone, like the punkha-puller in Forster's `Passage to India'. Could you truthfully own him as brother, much less presume to write about him ? And if you cannot, where does it leave you ? Speaking for myself it leaves me with a feeling far intenser than mere inadequacy. At moments, it could be akin to the anguish of being torn away, lacerated beyound recall. At others, it is cultivated callousness. I seek to rationalise that the disparities, abysmal as they are, go with the fascinating diversity of life in my country. They provide some contrasting colours to the background of my literature. Do I write about those other entities as some of my friends have done ? An unbanite 'intellectual' as I am, could I really do justice to their loves and hungers without maudlin sentiment and patronisation ? I decide against the adventure. So I write about my class and my kind of people, who constitute a miniscule percentage of the nation. But the defence mechanism does not work too well. The lacerated self cries out once in a while in agony and anger. That is when I leave off psychoanalysing the fundamental man, who deserves compassion, and my stories say how I hate the class to which I belong. I say I hate that gentleman (gentleman includes lady) of my class for his philistine virtues, self-deceptions, the sanctimonious humbuggery, so that he may consider himself alive and well. In other words, I hate myself. It is a personal situation, but I do think this dichotomy in relatedeness is faced by almost every writer in India when he descends (or ascends depending on the point of view) to the social plane, as he is bound to do sometime or other. For almost

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all of us writers are on a small elevation, not worthy of being called an island, in the midst of vast murky waters and we cannot avoid the realization for too long.

Do I then say that I can truly relate only to my class, thanks to the sharp diversities in the cultural climate of my country and that too in the act of hate ? What happens to my theory of love and respect for my customer ? Can creativity be sustained by negative emotions ? These and many such questions have to be answered for the sake of my self-respect as a writer.

For write I must. That could be a token of failure but is the only measure of fulfillment known to me. I cannot possibly wait for the bliss of a homogenized home to come about in due course or in the wake of a revolution or two. One of our poets quipped the other day, 'It was midnight when freedom came, and it is not yet day !' Let it be. The sages of ancient India were supposed to have the gift of supra-vision which could transcend time and space. A writer could at least grope through darkness and yet get moving, and nothing is lost so long as there is movement.

There is some comfort when I look around and find that quite a few of our writers in the present century have indeed been able to get past the ambivalence to a rare state of empathy. Premchand, Tarashankar and Gopinath Mohanty whom I have read extensively amaze me, the way they have risen to great creative heights in dealing with 'those others' with hardly a false note. They are my inspiration and make me hope that a victory can be won; anguished resignation need not necessarily be the condition of modern writing. They help me to dismiss the importance of looking pretty, in the Indian-English idiom or otherwise, in an elitist setting and to take courage and overcome or at least pass on the message to the younger writers.

There is some comfort in the realisation that inadequacy, alienation, and what have you, do not consume entirely the theme

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of relatedness. Pain, more than joy is bound to cut closer to the bones but it does not surely cover a larger area. One of our literary critics has made bold to assert that 'even if Grierson's 179 languages of India and five hundred and odd dialects are sung together, it would not be a cacophany, but a harmonious fugue'. I find it difficult to share his optimism born no doubt of patriotic fervour, but is undeniably true that the diversity by itself is not divisive. There is indeed much to be said for the unifying force of our folk-lore, music, dance, and such other communal expressions which take over the mystique of our great rivers, mountains, myths and gods. The saint-poets of medieval India like Kabir, Surdas, Chaitanya and others had in their simple emotional appeal to God-in-Everyman forged powerful links through religious literature which have not ceased to operate. Some affinities howsoever limited, have been created in the present century by the English language as also by the audio-visual goods produced in our movie-centres. Though there is the danger of throwing up a synthetic culture in the name of cultural synthesis, a genuine writer should be able to avoid the booby-trap if he wants to. At the aesthetic plane he can possibly absorb and transmute the varied colours, falling back on the age-old dictum of Herbert Read that 'art is an order to form'. The trouble arises only when the writer moves over, as I have said earlier, to the social plane where long years of foreign domination followed by the cult of capitalist progress have created vertical and vulgar disparities which can neither be absorbed nor wished away. However, who else but a writer is destined to suffer reality (with apologies to Nietschze) and lead the way ?

Then again, why should I hate myself for hating my class ? Can any emotion be negative so long as it is kinetic ? Haven't the psychologists told me *ad nauseam* that hate is not opposed to love but only to indifference ? The supreme vice is shallowness, whatever is realized is right' - that is a profound non-epigram from Oscar Wilde, and I could not agree more. If I can hold fast

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to my own concrete perceptions and 'realize' my experience, I should consider myself in love with my environment, my own slice of sky, earth and the humanity. Fragmented as I am, the very cry of reaching out to wholeness is an essay in love. And the process of reaching out does not stop with the limits of class, community, or even the country. I can perhaps lay claim, without fear of contradiction, to the love of a poem or a story I may write some day over this beautiful land I have had the privilege to visit, and its people. The feeling of oneness is, in the ultimate analysis, a spiritual perception, the same as our Poet had when he wrote the beautiful alliterative line.

Yukto Karo he sabar sange,

Mukto karo he bandho.

(Pray let me unite with them all,

and let me be free).

May I not have a feel, a bare glimpse of the promised land of love, even as I swear by the truth of concretized experience ?

These are the consolations given to me at this age, for I can not rewrite the draft of my life.

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MY EXERCISES IN FREEDOM

I have taken a cue from Jean-Paul Sartre, the eminent writer-philosopher of our times, in choosing a theme for my distinguished audience of today. He has propounded a thesis that appeals to me. Namely that writing is fundamentally an exercise in freedom which the writer posits against the freedom of the reader, and between them they seek to reveal and recover certain truths of man-in-the-world. And this is what constitutes a creative work of art, a work that is never really complete though it appears to be so. In other words, an artifact which is both existent and transcendent, a finished product which is always in a state of suspension asking for greater possibilities, of revelation, and of understanding too. The thesis fascinates me, and I imagine it would have a similar effect of any self-respecting writer or reader, even if he does not accept it, since it offers him a challenge, as it were, to prove his own importance in the scheme of things.

So as a writer it occurred to me that I may as well buy this ideal, and see how far I can measure up to it. And hopefully, I thought it may also induce my readers, given to similar ambitions, to work out a response, for that is what the dialectic demands of both of us, in mutual interest, as also in the cause of literature.

Now, it is futile if not impossible for me to probe into the fears and anxieties, the 'alienations' as Sartre would have it, which are embedded in my personality, and estimate the nature and extent of my success in overcoming them through my writings. That would be a highly personal and self-oriented exercise. apart

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from being of little value for my audience. So I will attempt today to deal only with the conditionings which I fear could have affected me as an Indian writer and incited me to struggle for my freedoms, for better or worse. This, I suppose, would place the matter in a socio-cultural perspective and interest my audience - my friends from Asia, from North America, as also from other parts of the world, and may prompt them to take another look at their literatures and ours with greater sympathy relative to judgement.

Broadly, there are four areas in which I think I should look for my ghosts, if any. The bane, burdens, imperatives or whatever of a) Tradition, b) Isolation, c) Market-place, and d) Establishment.

Talking of literary tradition, I endorse the sentiments of T.S. Eliot, and others of his kind, when they ask a writer to pay his respects to his heritage, but for which he would not be taking off from a certain platform already gained. I agree with Eliot that "no poet, no artist of any art has his complete meaning alone." And that "his significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists." But I do not understand why the thrill and importance of the take-off should not occupy me more than any concern over the validity of my point of departure. And so I am unable to imbibe the wisdom of Eliot when he says that "the poet must develop or procure the consciousness of the past, and that he should continue to develop this consciousness throughout his career." On the other hand, I fear that such an overweening consciousness, caused by seemingly patriotic urges, among others, has inhibited our sense of adventure, and has not helped us, the Indian writers, to rise to our full possibilities in the times we have been living in.

To start with, the language of literature. I believe that we in India have clung far too long, for our literary expressions, to Sanskrit, a language which had ceased to be spoken, except in religious rituals. It is surely a great language that needs to be studied even now, for purposes of scholarship and for discovering our roots, the same as Greek or Latin for the European scholar.

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But what I consider unfortunate is that while all the modern Indian languages (excepting some in the South) derived basically from Sanskrit were brought into a reasonable shape between the 8th and 11th century A.D., depending on the relative development of the language in the respective region, all that came to be written in those evolved languages was not afforded the status of literature for a very long time. For Sanskrit was "Deba-Bhasa", the language of the gods in which the holy scriptures were given unto us, and it was considered to be the only language in which literature, true and proper, could possibly be written. The languages spoken and sometimes written by the common folk were the "Apabhramsa" languages, a rather derogatory term used to denote a derived and impure language, whereas it should have, more appropriately, been considered as evolved, the vehicle proper for expressing the current thoughts, sentiments, and ideas of the people, and therefore of literature. This dichotomy between the supposedly pure and exclusive language of literature and the language of the common folk could perhaps have been removed in the normal course, with the shifting of court patronage to a language which would be more suitable for purposes of communication between the ruler and his people. But this was not to be. India came under Muslim domination, and Persian replaced Sanskrit as the court language. This induced the opposing trend of Sanskrit being entrenched in its citadel, as the language of Hindu scholarship, pitted as it was against Persian, and it was patronized by the Hindu potentates surviving under Muslim suzerainty. Thus, though the Medieval period in our history saw a natural progression and enrichment of the Indian languages (which came to include, in due course, a newer language derived from Persian, namely Urdu) literary writing in these languages was frowned upon as being "common". Conversely, a relatively greater merit was conferred on, say a Bengali or Oriya work of verse, if it was more Sanskritized in diction, and more demonstrably attached to its poetics, never mind if it was more stilted on that

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account. Then came the English rule, and the consequent dominance of English considered to be the superior language, the rest being "vernaculars". However, thanks to the Indian Renaissance of the 19th century, which helped to liberalize and democratize the ways of thought in our society. the modern Indian languages have at last come into their own. But they had to wait that long, and that is a sad fact of history. Thus to a variety of other reasons one must add this historical circumstance of language to explain the fact that realism has not been a strong point with Indian literature till recent times. What else would you expect when the recognized vehicle, and later the forms of expression, have been so pitifully inadequate to express the range and variety of experience, in the flesh and blood, heat and dust of human intercourse ? Now, the question that remains is that though I may have arrived late on this platform from which I wish to take off, am I still inhibited by the overhanging shadows of a purer language ?

It seems to me that though the constraints of "Deba-Bhasa", as such, do not affect me any more as a writer, and I am free to draw upon the resources of a living and pulsating language for my creative works, I am still troubled by the overpowering presence of "Sadhu-Bhasa", i.e. the proper literary language breathing down my neck. In other words, the cult of purism in the employment of language is still with us, and while the contemporary writer has achieved a large measure of success this area, I cannot truthfully say that is has been a total success. I am afraid of being vulgar. I hesitate to use an earthy, full-blooded and picturesque idiom of the bazaar or the countryside lest my readers think that I am being flippant, or I wish only to shock them in an attempt to be different. Thus I imagine, I am pulled back from the depths of human thoughts, feelings and conduct, so I may not reveal the inelegant dregs. Somerset Maugham had said of Henry James that his characters did not have bowels or sexual organs. Not unoften that is the fear I have had to put up with, in trying not

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to give offence to my respectable tradition. But I must say that I and my fellow writers have been inching forward to state some truths sometimes in an appropriately plain and gutsy language, and I am confident that the battle will eventually be won.

What is the first cause of this puristic tradition in our literature in socio-cultural terms ? Is it because of the debt that our first voices owe to religion that literature has come to acquire a sacramental status, and it has been hard to dislodge it from its perch, howsoever uncomfortable it may be ? Or is it due to an attachment to formal aesthetics that developed in the practice of literature, thanks to its feudal origins, namely its association with and the patronage it received from the royal courts ? Perhaps both. From the master monosyllable "Oum", to the sonorous mantras of our scriptures, to the secular Kavyas of Kalidasa overlaid with sensuously beautiful images, on to the sweet and sad couplets of Ghalib, it has been, I suppose, a smooth progression that must avoid the common clay and the ugly truths of living and dying. For you must soar above the commonplace so as to be closer to God as also his representative on earth, and that compels you to be the purveyor essentially of nothing but beauty and sweetness - *"Ramyani Drishtwa Madhurani Bikhya"* - which must necessarily be the colour of truth in those higher spheres. Thus sorrows are bound to be beautiful. And sex too, to the extent that it can be cloyingly clinical, as we find in much of our erotic literature of medieval times.

Talking of the form and manner of writing literature that has come down to us in tradition, there are some aspects, other than prettiness, which, I think, we have had to reckon with. The tradition of the *mantras* that asks you not to be too articulate, so that a world of interpretation may follow the words for deeper and still deeper understanding. Those who are acquainted with our Upanishads would perhaps have an inkling of what I am trying to say. An attitude of mind that appears to anticipate Franz Kafka when he says that "Speech is possible only where you want to

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lie". This could indeed by a healthy tradition, in as much as it would help you to be more subtle and less verbose in your expressions, for greater effect. But wedded to the synthetic structure of the Sanskrit language, and a penchant for exclusiveness that I have referred to earlier, the tradition that actually gained ground in literature was the verbal condensation, and the tendency to obfuscate, in an apparent disdain for the common man who must find his own meanings into it. This explains the taut discipline of our Poetics and the emphasis on the *Alamkaras,* i.e,. the proper clothings and ornaments that the meanings must be wrapped up with. There was an interesting variation to the injunctions in the latter-day Poetics of the Dhvani school propounded by Ananda Vardhana which laid a relatively greater emphasis on "Dhvani", the associative aspect of the written word that reverberates to multi-layers of meaning, harking back to the power of the mantras. But it all adds up to a very distressing question for the contemporary writer - How heavy and important can you be with your words, so as to make heavy weather of your meanings howsoever trite they may be ? Would you not rather let it go, the words as they come, expressive of the meanings as they occur to you in your experience, hoping the reader will glory in the freedom, just as you do ?

And that brings me to the essentially poetic traditin in our literature which places such a premium on the word itself, as distinguished from what one would wish to achieve by the use of the word. With us it has been verses and verses all the way, with some poetic dramas thrown in between, from the majestic Kavyas to the dewdrop-like Urdu couplets, till very recent times. Our earliest novel in an Indian language, namely the Bengali "Ananda-Math" by Bankim Chandra was published only in the latter half of the 20th century. And the short stories came later. So is it any wonder that a story-teller in modern India like me, has had to be wary of placing his feet on a soil that might suddenly give way, exposing him as a clumsy fool who could not stop rushing

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in where angels....etc ? Interestingly, story-telling, though couched in verse, has had a long tradition in Indian literature, starting with such epics as Ramayan and Mahabharata. But its prose equivalent came much later, perhaps with the Jataka stories of Buddhist mythology, and they were addressed to the common folk rather than the pundits and connoisseurs. And as a scholar has put it "they provide a healthy corrective to the piety, mysticism, and introversion of much of Indian literature". The modern story-teller with his credentials of realism, psychoanalysis, and what have you, is no doubt a different kettle of fish, but he has been doing no less. That is, applying correctives and flying in the face of tradition to state some truths of human existence as he sees them, in a correspondingly expressive language. And that is how he has had to fight a harder battle, as compared to his poetic counterpart, and deserves your sympathies.

More than the form and manner of expression, the substantive core of my writings involves me in an avoidable debate, thanks to a cultural tradition which is, as the HIndi critic Nirmal Varma would say, "more philosophically than psychologically oriented". It is maintained by many adherents of the so-called Indian values that our philosophy negates `original sin' as the essence of human condition. That we believe, on the other hand, that man is the son of the Divine (अमृतस्य पुत्रः) and than our every step forward, intellectual, spiritual, or whatever, is bound to carry a footnote of bliss, an apprehension, be it immediate or futuristic, of `Ananda'. It is stated that that is why there is no tragedy in in Sanskrit literature, and our modern writers have no business to load their lines with such imported stuff like *angst*, alienation, despair, *et al.* Even a noted Indian poet Srikant Varma propounds the theory that "reality can be interpreted only within the framework of a tradition," and that " the superimposition of ideas alien to the basic requirements of a tradition makes the creativity of a nation anti-self and anti-being." Pitted against this conservative approach is the school that swears by existentialism,

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seeks to differentiate Kierkagaard from Sartre, and protests that modern India is, after all, a part of the modern world that grows smaller every day and we cannot afford to reject certain Western thoughts and ideas imbibed by us over the last century or more. In this mighty confusion, I am one of those who would like to register the humble plea, that for heaven's sake let me, as a writer, pursue my own perceptions of reality in my own familiar environment, exposed as it is to influences far and near, to the hoary past of *Aryavarta* as also the brash present of Hollywood. And if sometimes I am stupid enough to say that man is an absurd animal, let us consider the proposition like any other in the generosity of our mutual freedom. Yes, it is indeed the "generous" exercise of freedom *a la* Sartre, by the writer and reader alike, that I have been asking for all these years. But I wonder If my efforts have always been adequate or the response satisfying.

Finally, before moving on to areas other than tradition, I would like to make it abundantly clear that I am not opposed to my traditions as such, literary or otherwise. I concede that some of them would perhaps be inherent in me, whether I like it or not, as a part of my "collective unconscious". Nevertheless, in the intellectual awareness given to me I value my freedom more, and that is how my projections as a writer have sometimes appeared to be challenges, if not affronts, to a wise and benign ancestor. But could I have helped it ? And what is more important, would It have been better for the society if I had ?

Let me now speak about my fear of isolation as an Indian writer, and more so as one whose mainstream of writing is in his mother-tongue – the normal vehicle of expression for anyone who wishes to make himself heard. This language, known as Oriya, is spoken by about twenty-six million people, almost equal to the population of Canada, and is listed as one of the fourteen major national languages in the Constitution. So how come this self-defeating sense of being left alone ? – it may legitimately, be

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asked. To which, my answer, I am sorry to say, would be like a cry of anguish. For I find it hard to accept as a fact of life, that my supposedly wise and beautiful lines will reach but a few of my countrymen, and there is very little I can do about it. I have been talking glibly about the desired collaboration between the writer and the reader, towards greater freedom, progress, etc. But pray, where are my readers ? The minuscule elite among the literate who care to read literature, and among them only those who still retain some love and respect for the native Oriya variety ?

It has been rightly said that literature is essentially middle-class, as it is only this class of people, reasonably free from want, but not unreasonably envious of the wealthy, who would like to make much of the non-material "nonsense" of art, literature, etc. But in my country it goes well beyond this all-too-common situation. Because our middle-class is not a bubbly mix of colour that lies somewhere in the middle of the social spectrum, Rather it is so sharply removed from the unwashed masses of the poor and the illiterate, that it shines bright by contrast, howsoever shameful that may appear to be. Within this class we have the intelligentsia, the lawyers, doctors, teachers, accountants, bureaucrats, etc., of whom there are bound to be a few disposed to write for pleasure. And it follows that there are some others who would surely like to read them. But my submission is that this socio-cultural intercouse is increadibly thin, because I live in a society that still suffers from a deep divide that puts me in an exclusive club, which, to my mind, is but an isolation camp, Known otherwise as the elite.

Could I save my depreivation (or minimize the guilt, to put it differently) if I write about these others with a greater measure of empathy ? Possibly yes, but the results would be minimal. For most of us, who are no George Orwells, cannot affored to live with them close enough for long stretches of time, and hence are likely to indulge in sheer romance or intellection on behalf of the

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unfortunate. And that does not enhance them or help my readership - does it ?

Now there is another curious circumstances of my being an Indian writer writing in one of the national languages. For it is also considered to be a regional language, and does not yet enjoy the prestige that should have been its long-deferred due after Independence. The official languages of the Union of India are Hindi and English, though the use of English is supposed to be a transitional circumstance. And while the official languages of most of the component states are the regional languages concerned, English is generally used for administrative and allied purposes, at least at the higher levels. So the fact of the matter, at this point of time, is that English still commands a certain unwritten status of superiority, call it the colonial hangover or whatever, and there is a pseudo-elite among the elite in every region who are happier with Irving Wallace if not E.M. Forster, than with whatever is published in the language they speak at home. Which, alas, reduces my readership to distress levels, or so I think.

Neverless I have every reason to hope for a more homogenous society in the near future in which my freedom will have a wider base, thanks to the heroic measures being taken by the government to eradicate poverty and illiteracy. And I am heartened by some practical steps being taken of late, to realize the truth of the dictum pronounced by Jawaharlal Nehru that "Indian literature is one written in many languages". That is when I can indeed savour of a fascinating freedom through a vastly interesting interplay among the various linguistic groups within the nation. And this makes me look forward to the day when Indian literature will come to be known abroad, not by a mere handful of R.K. Narayans and Raja Raos, eminent as they are, who prefer to write and publish in English, but by the translations of many other contemporary works of masters writing in the Indian languages, which are equally if not more resonant with the authentic sights

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and smells and intimacies of the Indian ethos. So I reckon that those who come after me, in say another decade or two, will have less cause for lament. But till then I must suffer my exercises in reaching out, which can sometimes be painful and desperate, towards a larger audience and a more meaningful freedom.

Does the writer of literature have to relate to a market place and then bemoan the loss of his freedoms ? Not if he can help it. For the Sartre-kind of writer is not too bothered with the exchange value of his works. He seeks his returns through responses, not in terms of any material benefit but various intangibles of his own choosing. And, paradoxically, the Indian writers have perhaps measured up to this ideal a little better than their counterparts in developed countries, thanks to their limited reach, among other reasons. But the times have been changing. India has been trying desperately to catch up with the affluent society, with the result that the buy-and-sell syndrome is now a preponderant fact of life, and a literary work cannot escape being treated as another piece of goods that must sell, or else. The temptation for a writer to sell his talents for good money are stronger than at any time before, as the disparity between the money-value of a serious work of literature and a frothy pseudo-intellectual piece that goes well with mass media but costs less in time and effort, is too large to be ignored. I do not have to elaborate on the theme; the malady is all too evident in the Western world. BUt it cannot be denied that to the extent a writer is tempted, beguiled or persuaded to write in a certain way to satisfy an extraneous need, his competence to tempt, beguile or persuade his reader to join in fulfilling the creative purpose is diminished accordingly. The pristine purpose is transformed into an artificial need in order to boost his credentials in a commercial world, and as Franklin Roosevelt used to say, "a necessitous man can never be a free man".

I suppose I have not yet been a victim of this need, but I cannot honestly say that I have not strayed once in a while, to

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repent at leisure. But the demands of a material world are insatiable. To quote a line from Bhagavad Gita - *"Habisa Krishna-vartema Bhuya Ebabhi Bardhate"*, that is, the flames rise higher and higher with each oblation of ghee fed into the fire. So will there ever be a reverse trend, or at least a modifying trend in the years to come in which sober thought will replace sensation as a proper occupation for leisure, and literature will renew its overtures to philosophy ? I hope so, I ask of the future, with the utmost passion of a prayer that it shall be so.

Last of all but by no means negligible, are the dictates of the rulers, or rather the Establishment in modern parlance. These are known in history to have curbed the freedom of the writer-cum-reader in no uncertain terms, in the name of all that is good for the people, such as common decency, public morality, socialism, and even democracy. Am I not happy as a writer that India is still a democracy in its political structure, and soft enough to be termed as a "functioning anarchy" by the socio-economist Gunnar Myrdal ? Of course I am. However, in a vast country like ours, a hydra-headed monster like the Establishment cannot be relied upon to act always in an enlightened manner. It does, at certain levels and at certain times, yield to the obscurantist and other negative forces in the society and compel a writer to behave. Let me not dwell upon the many subtle and not-so-subtle ways of doing it in a democracy, soft or hard - the incentives, disincentives, favours and frowns administered by the powers-that -be which allow the writer to roar once in a while, but only as " lions under the throne". I and my friends have not been strangers to such veiled threats to our freedom. But it has been possible, more often than not, to get past them, and that speaks of the inner strength of our democratic way of life. All said and done, I should remain satisfied with the ambivalent status enjoyed by an honest writer in contemporary India. It is perhaps rooted in the original conflict referred to by Sartre when he says that a writer is a parasite of the governing elite, but functionally he

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moves in opposition to the interests of those who keep him alive. That apart, I am apt to gloat over the circumstance that in my country the Establishment would hardly ever smother a writer's freedom with an angry outburst of ` enough is enough'. For haven't I said that our literature wears a certain halo around it, which it owes to tradition ? So how can a master, howsoever powerful he may be, commit the sacrilege ?

I am not naive enough to imagine that the generosity of freedom that Sartre places before me as an ideal can ever be redeemed in an imperfect world. But what I have been seeking to imbibe and experience is that glow of freedom which would make me feel that I am indeed important in the scheme of things, and agent, as it were, of the "permanent' revolution which would take me and my fellow-men nearer and still nearer the millennium on earth. The measure of the success achieved by me is immaterial considering the grand and distant profile of the horizon. And I shall be happy if I can interest you in an invitation to share with me the intensities of this dream, not necessarily as fellow-writers or lovers of literature, but as citizens of the world. It bears repetition to affirm that the quality of freedom is total and indivisible. Thank you.

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NATIONAL UNITY AND INTEGRITY IN INDIAN LITERATURE

I am grateful for the opportunity given to me of speaking today on perhaps the most important topic of the day, which concerns the life and honour of each one of us, and also relates to a vocation pursued by me over several decades, with an ardour second to none. But you will please excuse me if, as a writer, I also seek to ask myself a question that troubles me in this connection – Is it expected that I should reassure you about the patriotic fervour of of the Indian writers, past and present, as revealed in their works ? That is, their works are not found wanting in a virtue that goes by the name of "national unity and integrity" ? If so, I am not competent, I am afraid, for the job in hand, for I have always held that good literature equates an honest and elegant expression of the truths that the writer has perceived for himself through his experience, observation and the imagination that derives from the same and not the desired thuths , those he is apt to cherish as moral precepts. However, in the belief that the distinguished audience are in general agreement with my views, I propose to say a few words on the subject which may still be considered useful without doing offence to my core ideas on what constitutes good literature. So the question I would like to deal with is whether there has been a large body of Indian literature which is infransically good, and also speaks of a certain recognizable Indianness. Which, of course, does not preclude the worth and importance of other good

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literature written in our country that may not be so pronounced in projecting the said Indianness.

Taking of Indianness, I would like to submit, at the outset, that it does not consist, necessarily, in a community of life-styles which can easily be recognized by readers all over India, from Kashmir to Kanya Kumari as Indian, in contradistinction to other literature that would be dubbed as non-Indian. It is quite possible that a writer who has not had the opportunity or inclination of travelling beyond the confines of his native village or district - it was indeed so when communications were not so easy as at present - which is uniquely local in its smells, colours, and echoes, may still be perceived as one who conveys a state of mind that can be called Indian. That is, an attitude to life and society, derived from from tradition, that binds him to many others he may not have seen ever in his life-time. For what matters most is the ethos common to people who have been calling themselves as Indians over the ages, and not the ethnicity which may well be widely disparate. One would no doubt be happy to note a similarity in ethnic expressions leaning heavily on cultural mores, when he detects one in Indian literatures written in different languages. Thus it is a joy to find in the wailing strains of the Chakulia Panda', in a poem by Sitakant Mohapatra, the same romantic - cum - spiritual anguish that one is apt to notice in poems glorifying the Baul singer in Bengal. It would seem that both are wondering minstrels of a type unknown outside India, except perhaps in medieval Europe. But such similarities go only thus for and no further. And a sceptic cannot be faulted if he brings out dissimilarities galore in the folk expressions reflected, say, in the literatures of Kerala and Punjab, and argue that it would be illogical to look for one and ignore the other in a bid to prove the point. But what I am trying to say is that it is a shared ethos that comes out forcefully in our literature written in different languages, both ancient and modern, more than its reflections in cultural life-styles, which could be misleading.

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National unity and integrity in Indian literature is therfore, to my mind, the glowing but sometimes exasperating expression of an ethos which has permeated our literature through ages, even if the political sands of our nationhood may be shifting form time to time. The values derived from the said ethos which impinge on our literary sensibilities constitute the cohesive force of our "lives together", call it a nation, a community, or whatever. Regardlers of whether we accept it or rise in opposition to its dictates, under the influence of the so-called liberal values and scientific temper derived from forces outside of tradition.

How do we define the Indian ethos ? Largely, it must remain an emotional awareness of our Indianness, which cannot be easily docketted and classified. It also tends to resolve itself into several strands and ramifications which cannot be contained within the scope of a short discourse. Nevertheless I will venture to place before you a few elements in the said awareness which I have not been able to evade either as a reader or a writer, thanks to their deep-rooted hold on my psyche. One of them, and a very important one at that, is the sense of reverence. Reverence for the land we inhabit with its life-giving streams, hills, and forests, reverence for the ancestral spirits as also the spirites of Nature, reverence for the elders, reverence for Sahitya itself as a blessing conferred by *Bag-Devi,* reverence for the holy cow, so on and so forth. I concede that the reverential attitude may not always the deep and genuine, though we may go through the motions. It is also a fact that the modern western educated Indian is tempted to scoff at some of them and not without reason, since an abiding sense of reverence for all kinds of men and things does not help the critical edge to knowledge. Nevertheless it is a fact that a sense of identity in our attitudes of reverence does take us much beyond our linguistic barriers, and is bound to be reflected in our literature, characterizing it as peculiarly Indian.

I am reminded here of a story by Shantanu Acharya, one of our eminent story -tellers named, "Hrida - kalapa" - the lock that

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we fasten our hearts with, when we consider ouselves merely as members of a particular linguistic or ethnic group. Oblivious, or may be afraid of the emotional upsurge that may overwhelm us when we are made to behold the grand and awesome face of India, with its majestic hills and rivers, etched in our racial memory. It is story of co-passengers drawn from different parts of India, seated in the Madras Mail, moving southwards. And among them a vegetarian South Indian having to share the same berth with a non-vegetarian northernor. There is a palpable antipathy between them to start with, though, ironically enough, the ethnic differences are not too apparent as they were similarly dressed in the Western style. But, lo and behold, the bolted door cannot withstand the rushing waters of Godavari ! For when the train passed over Godavari, the southerner could not resist asking for a copper coin from his contemptuous co-passenger , so that he could utter the chant "गंगाश्च गोदाबरीश्च नर्मदे सिंधु काबेरी" and throw the coin into the river to honour the memory of their common ancestors whose souls were irrevocally at one with the sacned rivers of India. And there is this realisation dawning on the northerner that their common ancestors owe the tribute of "Tarpan" from both of them, mutually, just as his Ganga was entwined, ever and always, with Godavari of the other, in an ineffacable embrace.

While the abiding sense of reverence can indeed he ennobling, it can also be degrading in the world of human equations, when the injured individual ego fails to assert itself, and loses out to the sanctity of a social institution. A hallowed institution such as marriage, for example. The cruel ironics contained in the surrender have provided for climaxes in in several works of fiction in India, whereas they would be unthinkable, I imagine, in any other part of the modern world. Thus could the wronged first wife be ever induced to blow the conch-shell to welcome the incoming second wife, in obedience to the senctity of the occasion, which prompts the cad of a husband to be sensitive at last to the extraordinary

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situation, and tear away his garland, - as it happens in the Bengali story "Tilattoma" by Banaphul ? But such things do happen and have not ceased to happen in Aryavarta, and our Indian writers have not failed to take note of them.

Next to reverence *per se* is perhaps our attachment to *Dharma,* which is an integral part of our ethos, and is distinctive enough to set us apart in life, as also in literature. The word translates into a sense of duty which is not contractual, but hallowed in tradition, and so one can rebel against it only at his own peril. Thus Ramayana with its punch -line "भावनासे कर्तव्य ऊँचा है" is a living presence among us, not merlely for the devout, but also for the sensitive intellectual who reads or writes literature, for he has also to reckon with the opposing forces of liberalism, humanism, or even commonsense which prompt the individual to be pragmatic in his pursuit of happiness, whereas all our Dharmas, (राजधर्म, क्षात्रधर्म, पत्नीधर्म,) etc. the social obligations in various walks of life, carry the stamp of "Categorical imperatives" that admit of no compromise. But irrespective of how he considered the conflict, what matters for the purpose of this discourse is that it also a cohesive fore, this Dharma-consciousness, and presumes to elevate us as a people, no matter if the claim can be a bye-word someties for self-righteousness. And granting that we may appear to be `sanctimonious humbugs' in the eyes of a Western novilist like John Masters, it is no doubt a sobering thought that a certain residue of values still clings to us, which are beyond compromise or adjustment', as they would say in modern parlance, while the world outside of us has killed almost all its holy cows in the name of individual freedom and is desperately seeking to revive some, in order to hold itself together.

Finally I would agree with Nirmal Varma, the noted Hindi literature, when he says that unlike as in the West, our literary tradition is philosophical as distinct from psychological. This explains why the genius of Kalidasa is so very different from the genius of Shakespeare, though both are rightly acclaimed as

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masters. The philosophical outlook, I believe, lights up the following attitudes of mind which are dear to us : a) Does not matter; b) There is light at the end of the tunnel, and c) Look at the stars, they are more beautiful. Let me expand on each of them. The expression " does not matter" may appear to be a fatalistic attitude towards life. But it is not really so; it is only seeks to emphasize the ephemeral quality of our experience in the context of an illusion (Maya), that is life. And thereby provides the comfort that, after all, "this will pass" – the magic words written down by the town - philosopher in the so-called confidential notes he handed over to the sorrowing souls who visited him for solace and comfort, in one of the Malgudi novels by R.K. Narayan. But this is not to say that this will pass, and then there will be another and still another, and there is no end to it. No, there is bound to be light at the end of the tunnel, though you may see it only at the end of several rebirths. You are bound to receive the Bliss, said the sage Ramakrushna Paramahamsa, when you arrive at the Mother's, as you must, for no me goes back hungry from her house. The Indian mind believes in evolution, just because the goal is already there, and hence the journey. The End is at the very beginning, as Plato would say, a concept that goes by the term teleological', as distinct from the hopefulness derived from biological evidence, which is the modern way of looking at the theory of Evolution. And then, we are asked to look at the stars, rather than the worms at our feet or the Frudian bugs that our mental interiors are infested with. We are part of the cosmic wonder even if our little lives are full of misery. So it is the macroscopic or rather the super- maeroscopic way of looking at things, which is considered more relevant than the microscapic, as it is necessarily limited, and hence false.

Thus there is no tradition of tragedy in out literature, if tragedy is conceived as undeserved suffering caused by the gods as in the plays of ancient Greece, or by some fatal flow in the alchemy of the mind, as in the plays of Shakespeare. All our wronged

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Shakuntalas meet their lovers at the end, in the heavens, if not on this vile Earth.

It goes without saying that the Indian writer of today does not, usually, subseribe to this tradition of romantic optimism. Going by his own perceived truths, he is more likely to guestion it. But the fact remains that it is not a smooth passage; he has to negotiate a road-block, almost at every turn, shaped as it is by his own intellectual conditioning through ages, the respectable racial unconscious', as the psychologists would say.

I need not elaborate further on our Indianness, in terms of our spiritual - cum - intellectual beliefs which have servived through ages, and have been reflected, variously, in our literature. But it should never ever be a motivating factor in writing literature, on the plea that it serves the cause of Patriotism. That will be counter-productive, apart from the damage if may cause to the literary art itself, by being dishonest and pretentious, in order to sound proper. Secondly, much has happened in our history of three thousand years or more, with repeated invasions, and prolonged rule of races from across the borders, which were bound to act upon the original tradition. There has been a large-scale invasion of ideas too in the last few centuries, the importance of which cannot be minimised. It is futile to debate on the proportions between the enrichment of values and their distortron, that has thus come about. L'et us rather settle for the all-two-evident perception that our society is now in a state of flux, and we can no more rely, in out present life and times, on a solid core of ideological traditions to take care of the national consciousness. So what does a writer do in the circumstances ?

I would submit that the best bet for the literary life of a multi-linguical and multi-racial nation is when the honest perception of a writer cna convey naturally his sense of identity with the people he wirtes about, who may not necessarily belong to his own lunguistic and ethnic little acre of earth. In other words, when his

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sense of identity as writer can be married to his felt sense of unity with a larger body of people, as a citizen of the country to which he belongs. This is a challenge that was posed by the Canadian scholar Northrope Frye to the fledgeling nationhood of Canada, and the same, I believe, applies to India.

For let's face it, we are fledgelings, in political terms, as a nation, dating from out Independence in 1947, through as a people held together by several traditional beliefs that we cherish, rightly or wrongly, we are ancient. It is an irony of history, but indubitably true, that the British occupation of two hundred years had brought about an unprecedented sense of unity in us, which was reflected in, and also fed by Indian literatures of the period, - in the works of Subramanian Bharati, Prem Chand, Bankim Chandra, Gopabandhu Das, Birendra Bhattacharya, and many others. But the outbreaks of communal riots, the endemic conflicts of class and caste, and calls to secession have been too numerous and splashed with the blood of innocents, to be brushed aside as matters of no consequence when we are busy composing our beautiful lines. A writer of today who is also proudly conscious of being a citizen of India cannot but feel despondent in this situation. Yet I believe he can stll play Srikrishna to his own weak-kneed Arjuna and say "क्लैबं मास्मगमः पार्थ" You can surely fight your own kind of battle against disunity and separation. And on your own terms. That is, without offence to your artistic integrity.

I have every hope that he can do so. As Alberts Moravia has rightly said, a writer surrives his beliefs. He is after all, a highly sensitive person, which does not necessarily detract from his intellectual perceptions. So when Samaresh Basu's Bengali story " Adab" exposes the ridiculous fear and distrust between two rioters of different communities in a street of Calcutta, while both are equally deprived, it is his senstive portrayal that serves, in equal measure, the cause of truth as he finds it to be, and the truth he craves for. And the plight of a civil servant clothed in

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brief authority when he is required to check the smuggling of handfuls of rice carried by the miserable poor, veritable ants, across the borders between Orissa and Andhra Pradesh s brought out in Gopinath Mohanty's "Arts', scores essentially by its acute sensitivity to a human situation, while it does, by implication, scoff at the borders and barriers within the nation. Similarly, I do hope that in my English story "The Fish Mayonnaise" written in the background of the Nellie massacre in Assam, my intensities as an artist moved by the sight of bodies of children and young brides floating down the kalang river, have been more effective than any prescription I could have handed over to my readers in the cause of indianness, through a network of logic. For, basically, it is an emotive issue. A nation must feel as a nation, before it starts proclaiming the virtues of being a sovereign political unit in a given geographical area. And there we, the writers, have perhaps a distinct role to play, more as artists, than as merchants of ideas.

But, ultimately, I suppose I must hark back to the homespun sage of Malgudi and console myself with his famous words - " This will pass ". A tribute to my Indian ethos, which I am unable to shake off, inspite of my vaunted exercises in realism. Thank you.

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THE INSIDE STORY - AN INTRODUCTION

There is no denying that whenever something happens in our work-a-day world, which may not necessarily be important but is a shade more than interesting, , one is curious to know about what really happened to cause that happening. The assumption is that, by and large, there is always an interplay behind the scenes before the act is brought to the notice of the audience by accident or design. I too belong to the crowd that assumes thus and would like to gather the delectable knowledge', if I can. But is it fair and reasonable to insist that the truth of an event such as a murder, a divorce, or the sacking of a heavyweight minister would also apply to the non-event of a story, which is avowedly a story and no more ? That is what a writer asks and has been asking for ages, since writing began. But alas, his enterprising readers, editors and interviewers, and even the learned critic, are not in the habit of taking 'no' for an answer. What is worse, some are happy to play the detective, and surprise the writer with a result, no matter if it shows him in a poor light, apart from being fanciful. This being so, and knowing how my betters, past and present, have fared in the encounter, could I possibly balk at writing this piece ? However I must warn my readers that my inside stories may not be half as interesting as what I have caused to appear on the outside. And would they believe (and excuse me) if I add that these may not be even half as true !

I am not being facetious in making the last statement. I can tell you for sure that on a certain day or over a period of time a sequence of thoughts and events in the life of a roguish Rama

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and a sad Sita did occur to me as the raw material of a story that could deliver a satisfying climax. I am not unaware that quite often strange transformations took place in the processing of the raw material, so much so, that Rama turned out to be noble after all, and Sita a pseudo, offering a climax more delightful than pathetic, as I would have imagined. I could very well consult my diary and tell you exactly when these alchemies occurred in my mind. These occurrences are facts; I can vouch for them. But could I tell you fully and truthfully that so-and-so were my Rama and Sita in real life and this is how they actually behaved ? What is more important (particularly in the eyes of the psychiatric critic), could I explain why such characters and events, including the twists and turns, occurred to me as they did, and thus provide you with a glimpse of my mind that I have always found to be so charmingly elusive ? I am afraid it is a tall order. I would not go as far as Masti Venkatesa Iyengar to say that "It is as tough as asking a woman to explain how she is shaping her baby in her womb". I consider myself more fortunate, for I suppose I have been favoured with a few sightings of the conceiving and the foetal wonders, as I have gone along with my creations. But what I would submit is that I am incapable of revealing the process fully and truthfully, the external fact as well as the internal alchemies. I could further plead im my defense that my competence is not too relevant to your understanding and appreciation of my `truths', but that is a different matter.

With these apologies, I wish to present my own understanding of how my stories came into being for whatever it is worth. Basically, I agree with William Faulkner that "a writer needs three things. experience. observation and imagination, and any two of which, at times any one of which, can supply the lack of others." However I must confess that while I have made use of these inputs given to me, the proportions between them have hardly been ideal, and I have been obliged to draw upon the resources

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of my imagination, and to a lesser degree of observation, a little too heavily for comfort. Couldn't the truths of my fiction be more effective, I have often wondered, if I had lived through them the terms of direct experience like Gopinath Mohanty among the adivasis of Koraput, not to speak of the inimitable George Orwell among the vagrants of London and Paris ? Even the rural conditioning, evident in the works of most writers in Orissa, one of the least urbanized states in the country, has unfortunately been denied to me. A middle class boy, perhaps more upper than middle, moving on from a small town to metropolitan cities, including capitals abroad, and tied to a cloistered civil service like Audit and Accounts does not inspire confidence as a writer--or does he ? Some of my friends tell me, taking a cue from Adler, that these `inferiorities' of birth and circumstance have helped me to relate more to the universal human mind and reach greater depths of perception, bypassing the variousness of distracting visuals. Some others have said it's a pity I have missed the variety, the `riches of the world', etc. As for myself I can only say that I am sorry it had to be so, with the rider that I have tried to transcend my limitations not only by maximizing the inputs other than experience, but also by expanding the area of experience as best as I could.

It is vastly surprising in this context that there are a few stories that occurred to me almost on a platter of experience. Thus, for example, I was once travelling from Cuttack to Howrah by the Puri-Howrah Express, when it was rudely brought to a halt in the early morning by some local strikers at a small station named Mecheda. After an interminable period of waiting I beat it back to Kharagpur in a suburban train for rest and reprieve at the house of my niece, till I could resume my journey to Calcutta. I had thought it was a clever move. But in the bargain it turned out to be an unforgettable experience of being closetted with a horde of young commuters, students-cum-political workers,

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Irrepressible thugs as you may call them, who suggested to me the theme and title of story 'The Hundred sons', recalling the hundred spewed by Gandhari of the Mahabharata. The raucous chatter of these young ones, who could as well be my sons, exposing a shallow and amoral attitude to life, till they were driven to pull the alarm chain in order to help a poor and lame fellow-student get on board, failing which they threw a hard-earned rupee at his for rickshaw-hire so that he could get to his rural college in time - these were the facts I turned into fiction. Except for a slight twist that the rupee was borrowed from me, and returned unexpectedly by somebody at another stop, when my companions had already vanished and I had least hopes of recovering the miserable coin. This is one of my stories that has been translated and published in seven Indian and foreign languages and included in a Vikas anthology. Similarly there was this death of a fellow-Indian that occurred in Washington DC, when I was posted there, the elegant ritual with flashes of 'proper' sorrow, and the supposedly brave decision of the widow of staying back in the alien land. The basic fact, even the backdrop of a snowfall, are laid out truthfully in the title story of my book "Death of an Indian". What I have added is no more than a lovable exaggeration here and there, and a gentle raising of eyebrows over the shining dollar that peeps through the veneer of all that is proper and normal in our times. Then again I had once the dubious privilege of riding into the storm of a 'matinee revolution' in Calcutta in the late sixties. I had shared the defiance of my senior colleague in the Calcutta Corporation, of getting into his battered Buick for a ride back home. No wonder our vehicle was stoned, there was some shooting by policemen with no damage done, and the two of us had to take temporary refuge in the drawing-room of a charming lady, sister-in-law to my companion. These facts are essentially there in my story 'Red Evening' featured in Penguin's "New writing in India". But the

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colours and contours of the incident have been heightened, the evening sun has chimed in with a subliminal spilling of blood, and my juxtaposition to the conservative old-timer of a companion has been transmuted into the heart-searching of a puny revolutionary thrown into the company of a heroic reactionary who has apparently won he day, apart from saving his life.

These are a few of my stories in which experience has played a major role, in the descending order, and apparently I owe little to observation or for that matter to imagination, except for cosmetic and dramatic effects. But pity, there are not many more of this kind. The vast majority of my stories are not 'revealing' as you and I would have wished. There are some rooted in a personal involvement which is so universal, howsoever intense, that I cannot possibly give it the status of an experience. Thus for example, the death of my own child which forms the basis of my story 'The Dispossessed' and tells you how the sorrows of the young mother must yield to the machinations of Father Time. Again, there was the death of a close relative by suicide for love. There is really nothing to write home about this tragic exercise in human folly that overtakes the very young every other day. But it helped me to write the story 'Nishap' in which I have sought to bring out a certain profile in disparate love, so the girl does not have to follow her lover in death. And the cruellest irony I had to perpetrate is that a friend of the boy who had set out to avenge his death falls for the *femme fatale* himself ! There are numerous other stories in which experience of any kind is absent, and I have tried, as it were, to make a collage come alive -interesting slices of character, bits of absorbing atmosphere, hints of incident, and tons and tons of imagination bound together in a story that presumes to be true. Thus, the infernal braking of dogs that caused me to swear through many sleepless nights in a certain locality in Calcutta gave me the story of 'Dogs of the Night (published in French translation in Europe published from Paris),

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In which I have likened the uncommitted intellectual *bhadralog* of the city to a mangy bitch that mush die in the crossfire of a fight between the males, the Naxals and the Congsals. The overpowering emotion that seized me at the sight of the valley of hills in Darjeeling gave me the story of a young unwed couple who failed to consummate their much-awaited love in such a grand and awesome setting. Finally there are stories such as 'Godless' (featured in ICCR's modern India short Stories, Vol.IV) of a man having to choose, for no ostensible reason, between the death of two children, his son and the daughter of a dear frined, to which I have found no clue yet in any bit of experience or observation. So much for the vaunted creative process !

So I have come to realize for myself that in the final analysis what matters most is not the so-called inputs, but the world-view of a writer, derived from the totality of his experience. My own happens to be a world that is fascinating, peopled by characters given to flashes of illumination in situations of conflict that lead to nowhere. Climaxes that do not clinch the issue, but are meant to be satisfying nonetheless, opening out to horizons that might be reached someday. It is this unholy perception that has helped me to the crucial twists and turns, the alchemies that have yielded the 'gold' of my stories, well beyond what I recall having seen and heard and felt in any given instance.

To elaborate: my imagination coloured by the world-view is but the means of telling you what I consider as real. That is how I am not only allergic to happy endings as most modern writers are, I am no less averse to unrelieved and desperate sorrows. I yield to none in my appreciation of social injustice, but I have always felt that the way it is practised is so commonplace, subtle and based on the self-deceiving condition of the human mind that the best I can do is to attempt a curious mix of sarcasm and sympathy that may pass for understanding. My truths are not black-and-white but not gray either, as Andre Gide would say, for

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they offer me a constantly changing pattern of *vibgyor*, amusing in a lighter vein, but both terrible and beautiful when I cannot help being serious.

It is a sad fact that as I have grown in years. I am increasingly oppressed by the syndrome of seriousness. The intenser aspect, if you will. The god-like stance of amused and benign indifference seems to have taken me to a dead end, and I wish I could apprehend the total reality in a leap. That is, forget my dear ironies and seize God for his Truths, as it were, here and now. I do not know what D.H. Lawrence meant by saying that one has to be so terribly religious to become an artist. But I can sense his deadly ambition and anguish. However, no one need tell me that I have to settle for the anguish sans ambition for the rest of my life, ever incomplete and unhappy as a mere writer. Perhaps that is how I have been programmed to be by an unknown hand.

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THE ORIYA SHORT STORY

It sounds like a truism to say that the Oriya short story has travelled quite a long way since it came into being. But the statement deserves due respect when we must consider that even hundred years have not passed since Fakir Mohan Senapati's 'Rebati' was 'published in 1898. And isn't 'Rebati' the first Oriya short story, as this literary medium is understood to be in its modern idiom and context, all over the world ?

I am aware of the criticisms that are usually made when such a claim is made on behalf of 'Rebati'. Thus there are some who would refer to "Chatura Binode" by Brajnath Badajena, neatly classified into four parts *Neeti Binode, Preeti Binode, Hasya Binode, and Rasa Binode* - which was published in the 18th century, as the first Oriya short story. Some would even assert in a vein of cultural one-upmanship that the tradition goes further back in history when the peripatetic story tellers known as "Galpa Sagaras" used to entertain in the audience halls of Oriya Kings and the noblemen who were disposed to patronize the arts. But we must recognise certain indisputable elements of the modern short story, namely, a) structural unity in a reasonably small framework, b) not being too simplistic or fanciful, in order to please a child, an insomniac prince, or a demanding princess extraordinary, and c) relevance to the human condition in the contemporary social settling. It also goes without saying that these should be in recorded print as opposed to the floatingly free tales, which

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were recounted by the "Galpa Sagaras". These pre-requisites make us adhere to the view that "*Rebati*" is indeed the first short story in Oriya literature.

The advent of "Rebati" at a certain point of time in our literary history is not surprising when we notice that it is about this time - broadly the latter part of 19th century-that the innovation of a "plain" non-versified tale was tried in the various languages of India. It is also assumed in this context that the form and manner of the new literary genre was derived from the successful experiment made sometime earlier in the West, thanks to the benefits of English education giving rise to the Indian Renaissance in the 19th century. It is surely a valid assumption, though the exact nature of such influence imbibed by the pioneers is largely speculative. However, it is necessary to record as an intriguing fact that Fakir Mohan Senapati (1843-1918), acknowledged as the father of modern Oriya fiction, besides being the creator of "Rebati", could have had the least exposure to English literature, when he did not have any formal education in a school or similar instituation. It is also to be noted that he had himself denied the possibility of any such influence. So it is anybody's guess if the influence still worked on him in subtle and insidious ways that he was not aware of.

Anyway this intensely patriotic Oriya, who was anxious to explode a newly-created myth propounded by some so-called scholars from the neighbouring Bengal that Oriya was not really a separate language, did not have to take the cue from anyone in creating his pioneering prose. For while it was startlingly new, it was also unabashedly Oriya in its folksy language, humour and style. Still one is amazed to find that "Rebati" was no tentative beginning in a new medium; it was a mature piece. A story of the blighted hopes and ambitions of a girl of the Oriya countryside with tragic dimensions, it exudes a certain confidence which is hardly expected of a newcomer. It can even be said with some justification that as a piece of pure, yet authentic tragedy. "Rebati"

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has had hardly any rivals in Oriya prose literature till the very recent times.

The Oriya short story that began thus in the wake of the identity of Oriya language and literature, brought demonstrably to the fore by Fakirmohan in prose, was also aided, in no small measure, by the emergence of Oriya journals, largely motivated by the same impulse. "Utkal Sahitya" appeared in 1897, followed by "Mukura" in 1905, and "Sahakara" in 1919, with the avowed objective of enhancing the prestige of Oriya literature. And since journals are ideally suited to the medium of the short story, they came naturally to be the biggest beneficiary of these pioneering ventures.

But what about the qualitative progress of the Oriya short story after Fakir Mohan ? Did the writers who followed him in the next two decades go fast forward with the momentum provided by Fakir Mohan ? Dayanidhi Mishra, Dibyasingh Panigrahi, Godabarish Mishra, Bankanidhi Patnaki, Chintamani Mohanty and Laxmikanta Mohapatra are some of the best known writers of this period, who wrote short stories of some merit. They continued with the social motif of Fakir Mohan, as also with the non-Sanskritic Oriya introduced by him with a gusto. But it's a pity that they fought shy of his 'common' prose. Nor did they venture to play with and enhance the native charm of the earthy Oriya expressions, as a latter -day Gopinath Mohanty would. Also one looks in vain, in their writings, for the impish humour of Fakir Mohan, laced with sarcasm for the Anglicised upper crust. And what one misses most is the spontaneity of the Master, who seemed to have allowed his irrepressible self to go out and do its damned best in word-power, for the good of himself and the society. It seems, rather, that these writers were painfully conscious of the role they had to play, to cure the social ills, to convey a message, or to express the horrors of poverty, compounded by flood, famine, and pestilence which have been the bane of Oriya experience through ages, and hence the sheer pleasures of breaking out in

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creative joy had hardly occurred to them. However one must grant them the virtue of a pronounced social conscience. And the unerring manner in which they pointed an accusing finger at the callous ways of zamindars, moneylenders, and arbiters of society should have pleased, one hopes, the soul of Fakir Mohan.

Then we come to the thirties and forties, moving towards Independence, past the achievement of securing statehood for Orissa in 1936. These two decades were peopled by many eminent writers, some of whom are still with us. The most well-known names that are associated with quite a few stories of enduring merit in our treasure-house are Kaindi Charan Panigrahi, Bhagabati Charan Panigrahi, Ananta Prasad Panda, Rajkishore Ray, Rajkishore Pathik, Godavarish Mohapatra, Nityananda Mohapatra, Kahnu Charan Mohanty, Gopinath Mohanty, Sochi Routray and Surendra Mohanty. A large majority of them are novelists, while one, namely Sochi Routray, the second Jnan-pith award winner from Orissa (the first being Gopinath Mohanty) is basically a poet. Nevertheless they have given us some delectable short stories that mark a distinct departure from the heavy, moralistic, and often melodramatic stuff provided by their predecessors, with the singular exception, perhaps, of Lakshmikanta Mohapatra. The progressive trends noticed in the short stories of this period-considering progress, essentially, in terms of realism and artistic charm-are a) fluent style married to easily understood words of common speech, though it was still short of the pleblan prose of Fakirmohan, b) a certain lowering of the voice of protest, sorrow, or any such call to emotive response, for greater effect, and, c) accepting the gray middle class life also as suitable materials for stories, though the theme of social inequalities was still the standard fare. However these common denominators have to be qualified by the maverlck appearance of some memorable stories which are not-so-gentle, and go well beyond the "normal" relationships, with conflicts that may cause a moist eye or a sigh, to evoke the white heat of

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anger that one must owe to himself in an unjust society. Sometimes the bare story does it, while sometimes the writer chooses to depict the stark and almost revolting details of the social horrors which are no less effective . Two such stories that come to my mind are "Shikar" (The Hunt) by Bhagabati Charan Panigrahi, which has been made into a powerful movie named Mrigaya" by the renowned film maker Mrinal Sen, and Sochi Routray's "Mashanira Phula" (Flower of the cremation ground). In "Shikar' the poor wretch of a hunter is unable to understand, even when he was being led to the gallows, the supreme unreason of being punished and not rewarded for chopping off the head of a noted oppressor, so unlike the way he had been rewarded so far by the Sahibs for killing man-eaters. Whereas the aforesaid story by Sochi Routray seems to have been beautifully designed to fill one with divine disgust for the sheer ugliness we have been living with, in our society, in "Mashanira Phula" there is no attempt to spare the reader from the gory details of burning a young female body, a body supposed to have been fouled by illicit love and an aborted foetus, and hence denied the benefit of whatever beauty could be offered by rituals. But how does Jagu Tiadi, the malodorous functionary, who burns them all with glee, tear the nose-ring which belongs to him by the ethics of the burning ghat - from a face which is like no other in grace and innocence ? But I must note here that exceptions as they are to the general trend, these stories can by no means be said to have strayed from path of progress in terms of realism. For though they are decidedly strident in tone, they are ably concretised, and convey a certain authenticity of feeling and perception. And hence they do not plague us with any contrived call to action that a lesser artist would have sought to give with his *ersatz* intensities.

It is not possible within the brief compass of this article, to deal with the individual merits of the other distinguished writers who represent the general trends referred to above. However let me try to provide a glimpse with the fiction of a few, the choice

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being entirely personal, in the hope that as a writer, with no pretensions to the objective wisdom of a scholar, I can get away with my predilections. Kalindi Charan Panigrahi, Rajkishore Patnaik, Nityananda Mohapatra and Gopinath Mohanty are the ones who compel my attention for the purpose in view.

Kalindi Charana Panigrahi has been rightly hailed as a humanist. But this states the obvious and does not reveal his courage, better defined as "grace under pressure", in going against the current, and saying it all like a fact-finder with a barely sad smile on his lips. Take for example his short story "Sapua", (Snake-man). It deals with the life of a member of the community of snake charmers, who thrive on homelessness, having always to be on the move in order to perform with their snakes for a living. But this one is married for love to a girl of another community, who wishes to settle down with a roof over their heads and a patch of land to grow some crops in. Kalindi Babu does not allow this man to go under, in abject suffering, for trying to be different. But he suffers nonetheless, and mostly on behalf of his fellow men. And the conclusion is no climax, for his struggle with the authorities (class-oppressors as some others would say) to secure justice for the hapless community remains unresolved. What a change from stories such as "Sebatira Shaba" (Sebati's corpse) by Godavarish Misra in which the vicissitudes of life rudely disturbed by famine cause a demented lover to be reunited with the living corps of his beloved in a macabre climax!

Next I come to Rajkishore Patnaik. His break with tradition is even more remarkable. He also speaks for the underdog, but in a reflective manner, and with a touch of irony that borders on cynicism. The cynicism is however unmistakable when it comes to interpersonal relations between sexes. This cerebral writer is so chary of dramatic heights and intensities that he appears most of the time, to speak in a monotone. And yet his psychoanalytical meanderings that remind one of Alberto Moravia have helped to de-romanticize the Oriya literary tradition to a

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large extent. Enough,that is,to be thankful for in the land of legendary love and faith symbolised by Lord Jagannath. For example, the yearning of a married woman who would like to have her husband and eat her cake too, outside wedlock, is an unholy motif that could not perhaps been advanced so well by the present - day writers but for the pioneering fiction of Rajkishore Patnaik - the novella", "Sindura Gara" (The mark of Vermillion) in particular.

Nityananda Mohapatra has been an activist, and one - time minister, apart from being a dedicated writer, and he too speaks for the common man, especially for the long-suffering tiller of the soil, with first - hand observation and abundant sympathy. But it is his fiction on inter-personal relations that marks a new beginning. For he deals with the romantic psyche without glorifying it, and has been able to poetise the sexual cravings, as no one else had dared before him. In other words he has avoided the trap of cynicism in moving farther from the sentimentalism of yester years, and has helped to temper the dead-pan attitude of Rajkishore Patnaik, his contemporary, towards a more agreeable way of considering the strangeness of the things human. Has it not done some good to the runaway intellectuals of our times?

Finally Gopinath Mohanty, whose genius is so vast that it takes quite some effort to reduce it to a few one-liners. First and foremost, the delights of his language. No other writer since Fakir Mohan has taken language to such sensuous levels, integral to Oriya myth and idiom, so as to communicate ideas by the intimacies of feeling. Then we come to his prestige characters , flesh and blood in passionate portrayals, who are apparently larger than life, but yet persuade us to believe that man can transcend himself, after all. He is the alterego of our modernism, in league with our hidden spiritual yearnings. And above all, he will be remembered as the first Oriya writer who, could write so vividly, and in an overlay of warmth, about the neglected Adivasis in the manner of a George Orwell moving with the vagrants of

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London and Paris. His short story "Pimpudi" (Ants) is a powerful index of his achievements in this area. The locale is the border between Orissa and Andhra Pradesh and the question is of smuggling rice across the border, which is required to be checked by the hero of an official, in the interests of the State, and in obedience to the law. But what the official sees in the haunted eyes of these pitiful `ants' carrying home the morsels of food, takes him to perceptions well past the timidities of time, place and circumstance, and the commentary on a socio-political situation merges into the universal.

Before moving on to the next phase it is necessary, I suppose, to dispose of an idea that is sometimes advanced to explain the developing process. It is said that the winds of romantic resurgence blowing from the neighbouring Bengal, in the wake of Rabindranath, Saratchandra and others induced Kalindicharan and his cohorts to write as they did. For wasn't he an active member of "Sabuja Sahitya Samiti" a literary group committed to objectives avowedly green and romantic ? In my view, the connection is overstated. The literary trends in modern India have more or less, been contemporaneous, due to the common socio-political changes in the life of the nation. So a conscious attempt to come out of the classical mould or rather revive the clan of Fakirmohan, towards a free and fluent expression of thoughts, feelings, and ideas can be more suitably ascribed to the spirit of the times rather than to individual personalities across the border. That apart, the purely romantic fallout of the "green movement" seems to have been confined to a short - lived spurt in emotive and simplistic expressions in Oriya poetry, and is hardly discernible in the fiction of any of the above writers. The robust humanism of Kalindi Charan, for example, is far removed from the pale romanticism of Saratchandra, howsoever "realistic" it may be made out to be.

The passage to our times gets increasingly crowded after Independence. What else would you expect after the stirring

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midnight call to freedom ? Apart from those who continued to write and gathered many newly-instituted awards and honours, there were quite a few newcomers, and they have matured fast. Bama Charan Mitra, Achyutanand Pati, Kishori Charan Das, Mohapatra Nilamani Sahu, Satkadi Hota, Chandrasekhar Rath, Shantanu kumar Acharya, Manoj Das, Jagannath Prasad Das, Bibhuti Patnaik, Akhil Mohan Patnaik, Krushna Prasad Misra, Binapani Mohanty, Pratibha Ray, Rabi Patnaik, Jagadish Mohanty, Yasodhara Misra, Ramchandra Behera, Tarun Kanti Misra, Umashankar Misra....the list goes on an on till the present day, and I may be pardoned if I have missed a few important names. The present writer, now in his late sixties, is also one of them, still presuming to offer something new and worthwhile by way of his own perceived truths. So I can do no more than indicate some of the emerging trends, many and various as they are, and call it a day. The major trends are:

The individual man with his interiors and all, gaping or interesting as they may be, has come into his own, and he can still earn some respect, if he is in able hands without having to show a social face. Some of the leading practitioners in this area are Kishori Charan Das, Chandrasekhar Rath, Shantanu Acharya, Jagannath Prasad Das and Yasodhara Misra.

The social orientation has moved on from heavey pathos to pure sarcasm, and hypocrisy is the modern bye- word for villiany. Surendra Mohanty had led the pack, and the chase continues. The story "Banya Pare" (After the Floods), by Chandrasekhar Rath may be cited to highlight the change in perspective. Here the good old floods are still there. (Famine and Pestilence have, mercifully, deserted us by now), but the emphasis is not so much on the plight of the victims, but on how it is used to `good purpose' by the press, politicians, and social workers.

Irony has come to stay by way of sheer amusement and suggestive winks at possibilities, never mind the message. Kishori Charana Das, Manoj Das, Jagannath Prasad Das and Yosodhara

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Misra are some of the noted craftsmen in this mode and manner of telling a story.

The cross-currents of nihilistic despair and desperate affirmation are deeper and more turbulent, thanks to the heightened dialectic of living experience in the bloodied and fragmented society that we have been living with in this atomic age, and not necessarily to the remote influence of the existentialist literature of Kaika, Sartre, Camus and others as it is supposed to be in some quarters. Bamacharan Mitra and Mohapatra Nilamani Sahu are a few of the older writers who are pitted against a host of younger writers in this respect.

Some have deliberately deviated from the realistic mode, towards a surrealistic apprehension of truth, through fantasles, myths and allegories. Shantanu Acharya is a leading artist who has inspired a few others to try the experiment.

Rejection of the formal plot, in order to show a character or process of thought to best advantage is no longer a forgiveable deviation from the norm. Some of the younger writers such as Tarun Kanti Misra have avidly taken to it.

So on and so forth. But I feel like asking myself and my fellow-writers to be a little more bold in expressing the intimacies of our dreams and nightmares, and a little more unmindful of the calls given by our leaders, which persuade one to put the cart before the horse, by giving priority to commitments other than artistic integrity. And in this context I wish we could do more to give artistic credence to the unsatisfying truths of our perception - ambiguities of cause and effect, mixed motivations, and the basic formlessness of life that we have been ordained to live on this earth. Thus it gladdens my heart to come across passages such as this in Jagadish Mohanty's "Bahare Thia Hoithiba Lokamane" (People standing outside).

"There is no climax to life. We know that Sanchayita and Abinash, Abinash and Navaneeta, Navaneeta and Mrinmay,

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Mrinmay and Chandranath, are stuck at the doorsteps of each other. Afraid to step in, frozen in their own amblguities passing for individual judgements. And this is how it has been through ages......".

The Oriya short story has indeed travelled a long way. And the future possibilities are immense. The journey must go on towards ever-receding fulfilments, for it is idle to Imagine that literature can ever catch up with the exasperating yet wondrous mysteries of life.

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AUTONOMY OF LITERATURE

"If they ask me what my poetry is", said Pablo Neruda, "I must say I do not know. But if they ask my poetry who I am, it will tell them". It's a pity I cannot make such a pronouncement. I cannot afford, in these days of media power, to keep my mouth shut over the meaning of what I have written. Lest they take me for a cad or a fraud. So I would try assiduously to explain and annotate my lines, as best as I can, when I am called upon to do so. But as a writer, I am tempted to thank Neruda for having spoken out on my behalf, as also for the tribe of all writers, past and present, that my literature is but a reflection of my own unique self, and is thus necessarily mine, ever and always.

So I tend to get nervous when I hear about the theories of structuralism, de-construction, the positioning of my child as a *Trishanku* at some heaven equidistant from the writer and the reader, etc. I feel deprived. Rather dispossessed. How can my little one, chock-full of my timid expressions, deriving from a wordless phantasmagoria of dreams, nightmares, fears, yearnings, and what have you, assume a life of its own without involving me vitally ? How can my quarrels with myself which constitute poetry in the words of T.S. Eliot be revealed without considering me ? It's me, it's me - I cry out against those who appear to shield it from me and declare that it belongs to me no more. That it lives in its own right,, somewhere there, structured in my socio-cultural milieu and I need have no fears for its life, if

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it can manage to stay that way in the days to come. Or somewhere there, waiting to be peeled off, layer by painful layer, by the cognoscenti, so that the 'true' meaning of what I have written is brought home to the discriminating reader. Waiting to be reborn, as it were, without the genetic blemishes and birth-marks. It is born free, they tell me gleefully, though they don't grudge me the credit of having produced it for whatever it is worth. The maker has done his bit Over.

But leaving aside the natural anguish of the writer being thus marginalised, if not dispossessed, can he, in his sober practical wisdom, deny that the work produced by him is indeed autonomous, once it is released into the socio-cultural stream ? Is it not bound to fend for itself from then on, on its own steam, and deal with the avid readers, critics and all, sharks or life-savers as they may turn out to be ? Can the writer be within and inside of his works, all the way, to keep alive his ownership, and ask to be judged for what he himself presumes to be through his works ? How does a Shakespeare ask posterity to judge his Hamlet by the unique tone and colour of the creative impulse that seized him when he created that uniquely ambivalent being ? Or how does a Dostovoesky ask his Brothers Karamzov to be judged by the diverse facets of his spiritual discontent which are supposed to have been reflected variously in the three brothers, so different from each other ? What are the modalities offered by these great writers, other than their surface humdrum lives which only go that far and no further, in providing clues to the rich complexity of their products ? These are questions that need to be answered fully, and convincengly.

The writer can surely make the plea during his life-time that the inquisitive reader is welcome to approach him for enlightenment. But is it not a specious plea, with the pitifully short and fragile life given to a man on earth ? Nor can he make much of the phantasmagoria of images or the secret quarrels that were woven into his creative impulse, and the consequent

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inarticulations imbedded in his words, which only he can explicate, as far as possible. Because he cannot get away from the confession that such images, or conflicts as, distinct from his overt feelings and thoughts, were much too insubstantial for being passed on to the curious reader for his edification. Secondly if we subscribe to the view advanced by some, that apart from the overt influences working on a writer which he is conscious of, there is a bucket that sometimes goes deep down the well of his unconscious, and provides a certain extra dimension to his efforts that passes understanding, aren't we liable to be stopped in our tracks by the likes of Jung who would remind us that the said unconscious is but a part of the racial unconscious, and that no individual is privileged to know it any better than his peer in the social spectrum ? Rather they would maintain that it is only the professional with his probing skills who can reveal the behind-the-scene activities of the writer's mind, with the help of his expressed words and images, howsoever inadequate they may appear to be.

And why are you so anxious to append your signature to the work produced by you ? It is only the lesser artist who stands revealed in his works, while the creative mind of a Shakespeare would ever remain unexplored, thanks to the joyous confidence of his genius. For it is in the nature of creation to forget the creator. Like a flower that blooms and dances with joy, unlike a miserable human being who spoils the effect, sometimes, by thinking about his Maker and consequently the sequel of his unmaking. It is E.M. Forster, an eminent writer of our times who advises me thus, arguing in effect in favour of the proposition that my literature is autonomous. And that there is no harm done to the uniqueness of my personality, even if the errant child, grows in due course to an ideal state of independence, at some future date, when it would carry no visible trace of its maker.

Thus and thus I am obliged to relinquish my title over the little one, who ceases to be little as the days go by, and proves

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to me even within my lifetime, that the pundits are right and my anguished cry has little relevance to the ground realities. For not unoften, I find it decked in hateful purples, praised for the wrong reasons, or shockingly denuded to "reveal" my Freudian complexes, class motivatious, self-serving delights, even spiritual flights, which I could have never imagined for myself. And I shudder to think about the shape of things to come, when I am gone, and not available any more, to put the record straight. That is, to save my creation from its new-found uniqueness, quite a stranger now to the author who had conceived and brought it forth with the intensities of his intimate self,- of "blood, tears, sweat, and semen" in the words of Nadine Godimer - and had considered it as his very own for all times to come.

So be it. Let me rather settle for the inevitable, and try to salvage my self-respect with such pleas that I can make to posterity. And let them not, like Neruda, ask my literature to tell me who I am. That could be dangerous, the reverse osmosis of a child imposing its uniqueness on the parent, a circumstance any times worse than its going its own way. However I may kindly be allowed only to register a few pleas, as fallows, for consideration of this learned assembly:

Granted that I cannot leave an indelible imprint of my uniqueness of my works, and it is bound to be smudged, corrupted, or perhaps enhanced in in course of time, I would humbly ask the reader (and in particular the critic) to bear in mind that there was a certain uniqueness in the making of what I have placed before him, and, hence, try to imbibe the *angst* of the creative process before getting judgemental. One of our critics had put it beautifully when he said that in understanding literature one should feel like being a pilgrim rather than a tourist. Empathy is all that I ask for, whether you put my works on a pedestal or in a given frame work of your isms, theories, and neat formulations of scholastic dialogue.

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Secondly, while I have a healthy, rather awesome respect for the dons, I would implore them not to allow my literature to be ossified. That is, intellectualized with their valued interpretations to a point when it ceases to breathe, and is available only as an artifact in the hallowed precincts of the academia or available like the Vedas, only to the priests who can render its meanings unto each other, for the greater glory of literature. I hope I am not exaggerating. This seems to be happening in the West, with a view to preserve the sanctity of literature and save it from the advancing hordes of the commercial non-literature. But is this the best way to go about it ? Is it how we can save it from being swamped by the thoughtless hordes ? Exclusivity is not a by-word for autonomous bliss - is it ? I am not a votary of the so-called mass literature. But I would like my literature to be a living and pulsating communion between me and my readers - conceived, conveyed, and received in maximum, if not total freedom, the best that can be managed in an imperfect world. This is the most honourable and viable state of autonomy for literature that I can think of. And I believe we should work for it. This is the core of my submission before my fellow-writers and lovers of literature who are assembled here.

Not any umbilical cord that must inhere and proclaim its parantage. Not any academic exclusivity. Nor a self-serving isolation from other disciplines deriving from human concerns, intellectual or otherwise, which are equally valid - disciplines such as science, technology, sociology, psychology, political science, and the related activities. For they are bound to condition the thinking of the social man. And it follows that the current debates making the rounds in those disciplines are most likely to colour the making of literature with a modicum of passion and prejudice. I wish it were not so, but it can't be helped. Anyway as Alberto Moravia had said "A writer survives inspite of his beliefs", and so let me nurture my hopes on that sort of optimism and ask for certain achievable attitudes of mind on the part of the parties concerned.

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Namely (a) a conscious effort on the part of the author to break loose from the constraints as he sees them, irrespective of the conditionings of his birth and circumstance, which he cannot abjure as an existent man-in-society; (b) a reasonable effort on the part of the middlemen, the publishers, media and other such agencies, to cultivate a certain literary sensibility not necessarily opposed to their commercial interests, so that the "value - added" element caused by them is minimised; and (c) a conscious effort on the part of the reader to receive and appreciate the writer's writing for what it is, in an exercise of empathy, removed from the constraints that work on him, as he sees them. It is this status of autonomy at multiple levels that literature can and should aspire to, deriving from freedoms which are achievable.

In this I share the thesis of Jean Paul Sartre that writing is fundamentally an exercise in freedom, which the writer posits against the freedom of the reader, with the result that, as a creative work of art, it is not really "created' in the ordinary sense of the term, for it is at once existent and transcendent, a finished product which is always in a state of suspension, asking for greater possibilities of revelation and understanding for all times to come.

The thesis is fascinating, but it appears to be no more than a vision. Yet it is my submission that we can work towards it as an ideal, as a "heaven of freedom" to be invoked in our prayers, so that while it may not be attained in the foreseeable future, it can well be sighted by the succeeding generations.

Am I being too modest in my ambitions ? I hope not. Let us analyze the odds at each level in the continuing process of creation, communication and reception of literature.

What are the fetters on my freedom to write according to my honest perceptions ? I have always been asking myself, as I would ask all my fallow-writers to do some heart-searching about it, so that all the pieces are in, before we can deal with them, and get

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going as far as we can. Atleast push the *Lakshman Rekha* to the farthest point, that we can get away with. The pieces are many, so I will refer only to some of the mind-sets they come from, and how.

Thus, have we been able to shake off the "sacred" burden of the past ?" Conversely, how far have we been able to protect ourselves from the Western winds, which are not always health-giving as being scientific or rational, but can also be faddist, flashy, and fatuous ? For example, the covert sexual yearnings that go inevitably with the sad story of human bondage are still frowned upon in Indian literature written in languages other than English, if they are improper in terms of the socially-determined equation between relations. In the English language, there is no doubt a certain freedom from this constraint, but sometimes it translates into an anxiety to conform to some amoral pseudo-intellectualism derived from the West. Namely, the fun of calling the spade a dirty shouel, and of wallowing in obscenities for sheer effect, so long as it is laced with a smart play of words, witticisms and some instant philosophizing. For unfortunately, the target audiences are variously different in the fractured society that we live in. But I am not unduly upset over this dichotomy. What bothers me most is that perhaps we are quite often afraid to go against the current of the mainstream, lest we are damned as deculturised aliens. Whereas many of those who cater to the urban elitist sub-culture are mortally afraid of being considered as dhoti-clad squares. Either way, we are diminished as writers. Yes, let's face it. There are many powerful pressures that do work upon us, in the writing of literature, as in every other field of human activity. But my point is that only in literature that we can possibly withstand them without much damage, thanks to our professedly free, though illiberal society. So why not make optimal use of the tool given to us and serve the cause of Truth, dearest to our hearts ? By being bold and clever enough to get past the constraints or compulsions, through our artistic devices, without

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appearing to be odious ? I know what these pressures are, and hence this suggestion of making haste slowly. Now some of us, mercifully few, are even guiltier. They are not only afraid of being not approved, they are positively inclined to heed the inspirational calls, to earn the approbation of the powers-that-be. The calls given by our leaders, day in and day cut, to improve the society, serve the Motherland, do this and do that in the given context, so as to make our products worth while. It is not sufficiently realised that these are desirable modes of conduct expected of everybody. The writer has surely no superior claim to being exempted from this unwritten preamble to the social code. I won't even grant him the privilege of being amoral, any more than the man-in-the street. But his first priority is to produce an honest and handsome piece of work, just as it is for a cobbler, an architect, or even a bureaucrat entrusted with a creative job. His outlook on life will surely be reflected in his works, and so let it speak for itself and do good to the society in its own way. Thus I believe my own fiction helps to reveal our internal selves in a manner that should make my reader sit up and think, clear the many cobwebs of his self-deception, and prompt him to be a little more genuine for the good of the world around him. This may well be a vain assumption. But have I not done an honest job, and does it not, hopefully, look attractive ? That ought to be my primary concern, and the central appeal; the rest is secondary. If I heed the siren-songs and put my cart before the horse, I would only vitiate whatever good I am called upon to do to the society, for my product would then be an act of `bad faith', a hollow artifact shorn of substance - the substance of felt emotions wedded to related thoughts - and can never deceive the discerning reader. So what matters most is my artistic integrity, the true exercise of the freedoms given to me and yet, sought to be withheld, in the making of literature. The autonomous exercise of a talent, following the urge to express myself. Autonomous for sure, and not independent, thanks to the conditionings I cannot

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free myself of, as referred to earlier. But that is the best I can hope for.

The autonomy of literature, as is desirable and achievable, rests primarily with the writer, but not entirely. There is this imperative of communication. Communication is but a reaching out to another - the individual perception, understanding and enjoyment of another being. It was done by word of mouth in the ancient days, and so an instant rapport between the two was possible. Later came the printed word and a larger but limited audience who could be reached in person or by personal efforts. But we are now in an age when the good word needs to be spread properly by professional people, if I wish to be heard above the babel of much non-literature, and competing literature. Thus a genuine work of art is in every danger of being sidelined, or even distorted by the incompetence of these managers of communication,. worse, by their partisonship, the shenanigans of "media hype' in the guise of commercial compulsions, which can totally frustrate a writer, who is unable to reach out to them in the desired manner. I would not take long over this painful phenomenon. Let me concede straight-away that the honourable gentlemen are mostly guided by wrong signals, for which they are not to blame. Nevertheless I would implore them, as lovers of literature, to take pains, a little more than at present, to be duly discriminating and objective in bringing the reader and writer together so that the possibility of adding extraneous values to a writer's product at the cost of another is minimised. The communicator plays a very responsible and important role in presenting a literary work of genuine merit to the discerning reader, and he can hardly afford to ignore it.

Finally I come to the reader, at the receiving end of the creative process. For he has his own obligations, too, of freedom, which he is not ordinarily aware of. The kind of freedom that must respond to the one exercised by the writer, even as he goes through a poem or a story, almost casually, in his moments of

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leisure. Casualness is, in itself, indicative of a certain constraint working on him, - namely that he has many other important things to do. And he may also be tempted, later, to dispose it of with an instant reaction of 'good', 'bad', 'rubbish' or whatever, without much thought. 'Well, why not ? a reader may ask 'Need you bother about the speed of my disposals, when you should know that I belong, generally to the same class and culture, as yours and so my value - judgments are bound to be on right lines ?' Good question. But that is exactly what troubles me. Because the conditionings that have gone into my writing, as also the success I may have achieved in freeing myself of the pressures I am aware of, may well be mismatched with yours. If no poet has his meaning alone, without reference to the poets who have left the scene in the same cultural milieu, as we are apt to agree with T.S. Eliot, the 'meaning' belongs to both the writer and the reader. So I ask for no more than a certain togetherness between the two in trying to recover and appreciate the said meaning. The value - judgments will come later, but first, I need to have an exercise in empathy on the part of my reader, as I have said earlier, joined to a conscious effort to savour of his own freedom of choice. A freedom that can be attained only by his being duly aware of the constraints that are likely to vitiate his choice, and doing his best to overcome them.

It is only this interplay of freedoms between the writer and the reader, irrespective of the latent conditionings of their psyche that, can result in the autonomic effulgence of a work of art.

To sum up : Literature cannot be autonomous of the business of life. Consequently it is not divorced from other disciplines, and particularly those that profess to deal with the human condition. Nor can it be cloistered in any 'temple of learning'. It has to live, breathe, and grow towards newer meanings and realisations with the passage of time, in a mutual exercise of freedoms by the writer and the reader, suitably aided by the middlemen - such freedoms, that is, which are achievable. And as to its autonomy

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from the author, alas, I have to let it go with a wrench in my heart. However I hope I can live with it, and die peacefully, if I can see my literature flourish thus beautifully, towards a consummation that is never achieved, but is always around the corner. After all, as the poet Geoffrey Gregson has said, does not all literature resound to the victories of human incompleteness ?

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THE RELEVANCE OF FORM AND STYLE IN THE MODERN SHORT STORY

To start with, the discourse poses a question that a short - story writer is apt to ask - Why do you pick on me to justify the form or the lack of it in my story ? Have you bothered about its relevance in a modern novel ? No. For the novel is a "large thing" as Mrs Janeway, an American novelist puts it, and there is that happy feeling given to a writer that "he can put every thing in ". And when you have that large freedom at your disposal, there can surely be no limitation of a form, isn't it ? But excuse me, says the short story writer, I may not have that sort of freedom to be happy about, but do I have to deny myself the essential freedom of an artist, to choose my own form for the story I wish to tell you, or dispense with a format altogether, if and when I find it more suitable to my purpose ?

Apparently his plea is ignored by the literary critics. For the tradition demands, atleast ideally, that a short story should deliver the intensity of a focus, an illumination that ought to dazzle the sensitive reader, or may be blind him, in the apprehension of a revaluation. A revaluation, such as life is never the same again ! And since every focus is bound to work towards a containment, or rather a confinement, you have got to go by the limitation of a form, whether you like it or not. It follows that the form should be appropriate to the nature and substance of the given story, and thus we think we are within our rights to consider , if such

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and such writer of short stories has not been remiss in this regard - this writer of fantasies such as Shantanu Acharya, this writer of magic realism a' la' Isaac Bashevis Singer, this writer of mindscapes as a Kishori Charana is presumed to indulge in, this neo-romantic of a Mohapatra Nilamani Sahu, this writers' writer of a Manoj Das with his urbane and amused stance on human *varieties*, etc. No such questions, I am afraid, have ever been put to a novelist great or small.

I concede that such examination in the hands of an assiduous scholar, will yield some results. Mohapatra Nilamani Sahu may well be asked to practise the art of understatement, and Kishori Charan may be asked to be a little more explicit with his lines, which could possibly improve the intended focus, so that the objects sought to be illuminated - the character, the idea, the authorial statement, or whatever - stand out a little more clearly. But unfortunately, these writers like any other, won't listen. Because their responses to the world outside of them can be expressed only in a particular manner with which they are comfortable. And if they do listen to the pundits, they will only be harming themselves. As in cricket, so in the writing of literature, no writer, God forbid, may cramp his own style ! That will be counter - productive. The objects instead of being clearer , are likely to get hazier, if not distorted, if such criticisms are taken seriously by a practised writer of short stories. The point I am driving at is that while criticisms of form in relation to the substance of a short story may be valid, they are of little practical value, for the reason that the style of a writer which reflects his sympathies, his world-view, in fact his entire personality, dictates the form to which he chooses to marry the substance of what he has to say. It may well be an ill-contrived marriage that affects the impact of what he has to say, but it is neither here nor there, for it would be a greater calamity if he does try to "improve" on his style or form in obedience to a certain point of criticism which he considers to be good and wise. Perhaps a newcomer may

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derive some benefits from such criticism, but only before he develops his own style that reflects his unique' personality, which would then take over the choice of form for whatever he wants to pass on to you. And there it stays, for better or worse.

So my first proposition regarding the relevance of from and style in a modern short story is that since a style gives expression to the personality of a writer, he must necessarily arrange the marriage of the form that suits his style to the substance of his story, and it would be futile to lay down any guidelines for the match - making. For such marriages are always made in heaven, in the heaven that is of the creator. You may take it or leave it.

The second part of the question posed by the modern short-story writer has yet to the answered. Thank you, he would say, that I don't have to justify the form in which I write my stories. But does my story have to have a stated form unlike a novel, just because it is supposed to capture an intenser moment of life, whereas a novel seeks to *guice* you the feel of life over an extended area of time, space and consciousness ? Could I not get away with a seeming formlessness, if that conforms to my felt perceptions ?

This is not only an odd and unorthodox demand on the patience of the long-suffering reader, some would say, but also self-contradictory, given the premise that a short story must have a focus to convey a certain intensity. But what if I face you squarely in the eye and say that it need not have a focus ? That this theory of intensity, illumination or whatever which is supposed to inhere in a short story is an old wives' tale and that I am unable to accept it as a modern short story writer who must hold fast above all, to the honesty of saying what he has actually perceived ? Can he still be passed off as a short-story writer ?

Many would perhaps try to evade the challenge by saying that it is not relevant to the writing of short stories in India (and in Orissa, for sure), though it may be pertinent for a western

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writer with his penchant for flouting tradition. I beg to differ. While we may not be writing deliberately in opposition to the discipline of a form, we seem to be moving towards it. Traditional as we may be, our felt perceptions are telling us increasingly that life in its most minute moments is no different from the larger life, a drop of water is no different, in its essence, from the vast waters of an ocean. And so if you can project a large flow of living life absurd and formless as it is, in the appropriate formlessness of a novel, no questions asked, why can't you do it in a short story ? This is how many of us have been asking of ourselves, and these poor souls - I may not be one of - them deserve to be heard and respected. That is all I ask.

And who said it is not relevant to the present day writing in India ? Some of our modern short stories in Oriya may not exactly be formless, but the writers seem to be apologetic about the fact that they had to give it a certain form for the satisfaction of the average reader. A form that gives the barest impression of a certain roundedness, a sort of containment, with the device of a punch-line at the end in place of a climax and the semblance of a development by the stringing in of a few episodes at the same level, which is indeed no development, or some such make-believe, I came across a story recently by J.P. Das named "Aniket" translated as "No need for Roots". It depicts no more than the way of life of a vendor of books and magazines on a running train. There is no revelation that awaits you in the end, but it is still a charming story. I recall another story by Yasodhara mishra, named "The Room" where an old retainer dies in a certain household. So what ? Who said life is never the same again for the protagonist as a short story is supposed to tell you at the end? On the other hand life is ever the same again in this story. One can always go back to his "Room" or maybe to his own "Cage" as a famished tiger does in a story of the same name by Ram Chandra Behera.

And talking about myself, I implore you to believe that the older Kishori Charan is vastly different from the younger writer

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who tried to offer you a certain intense moment that illumines, and is eminently satisfying to both of us. Awfully mixed or rather mixed - up motivations which add up to a certain frustrating play of light and shade in the characterlessness of my characters, as also the enormity of hells paved by the best of intentions on the moral plane, have tended to make a mockery of what I had meant to say at the end of if all. And so I clothe it with loads and loads of irony, more than ever before, with sly pointers that lead nowhere, or perhaps every where But strangely enough some of these stories, have been considered to be charming, even by myself !

So I must ask my learned audience to consider my plight, and by the same token, the fate of the writers of formlessness in a modern short story. A noted Western writer had said that he had no objection to a short story being just a slice of life, but for God's sake let the slice be somewhat rounded, a sort of bread-roll, he pleaded. I must confess that I had favoured this conservative approach for the young writers, in my little treatise named *"Katha Sahityara Kala O Karigari"*. Nevertheless the votary of formlessness deserves to be heard and such stories should be considered on merits other than form or the style that goes with it. For such is life that is genuenily perceived by many of us. Art is an order to form, said Herbert Read, the noted critic, But it should be recognized that every order is an imposition and all impositions tend to affect the truth of a perceived reality, in the fullest exercise of a writer's freedom. And so let the obligation of a form be detached from a short story, as it has already been, almost, from the longer fiction. And I imagine that it can still be charming and satisfying in the hands of a consummate artist.

In a seminar held some time back in the academia of USA, the given topic was "Is the short story necessary ?" And after having exhausted all theories and practices concerning this art form they came to the curious conclusion that it may not be necessary, but it is still essential. Essential, that is to the writer

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himself, and that is what is most relevant, For that is what makes his experience coherent to him. I may be permitted to add that if the resultant form is incoherent, let it be; that is how he wants you to see the world. And with all the sympathies, given to a fellow-suffer, you may atleast try to see it his way.

John Cheever, a short story writer, had once said in extolling the superior pointedness in a short story as compared to a novel, I am very sure that at the very moment of death one tells oneself a short story not a novel" May I suggest that such a moment, which can be called the climax of a fiction short or large, is also the climaxing of an incomprehension that has goaded you all your life ? And so how pointed can it be in clinching the story? Or would you like to recite to yourself a poem on the final question that has no answers as Rabindranath did ?

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WHO IS AFRAID OF THE 21ST CENTURY ?

You can trust a writer to make this pitifully brave statement, if he happens to be one who is almost at the end of his writing career, just as the present century is coming to a close. For he sees a ghost, one too many, grinning at him. The thing appears to be uncouth, but it is supposed to be superior, as it carries within its computerised frame aeons of hope and energy for the young hopefuls of today. So when it sets eyes on the ageing Indian writer ambling along, thoughtfully and at a leisurely pace as is his wont, he grins. And sends out the message loud and clear - Get going, and get there fast, will you? The writer receives the jolt, the message, as also the veiled threat that he must belong to the stirring times or perish. And he comes out with a stock reaction. You can't blame him for it, for he wishes to survive, even as a member of the endangered species, the status he has come to acquire over the years, well within the ambit of the current century.

I am not afraid. I am willing to respond as best as I can. I may not live long enough to see the beginning of the coming century, but I must help to make the passage smooth. I must hand over the torch, burning well and true, to my impatient and intrepid successors. Surely I don't want to be fossilized that soon... thus and thus he invokes the powers latent in him (or so he thinks) as a writer.

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Does he succeed ? Can he hope to succeed? Or has he misread the signals? I shall try to place these and allied questions before my distinguished audience as an Indian writer who is understandably anxious at his age to retire and call it a day... and yet cannot resist the temptation of playing with a few famous last words.

Now, what exactly do you expect of me 7 -he ventures to ask the apparition. At which the grin broadens, as if to suggest that it shows. That the present-day writer is hopelessly involved in his own artifacts. He hardly reads the news of the world around him, and in particular the pronouncements made by our leaders. He is not familiar with an wonderful end-product of science, namely the computer. And worse, he is not much of a patriot, for apparently he does not feel within himself (unless provoked by the more substantive citizens) the urge to a newer Independence, etc. which adds up to saying that it was stupid of him to ask and enquire.

So the writer does his homework-to decipher and interpret the trends of the 21st Century as brought home to him by the media, his leaders, intense young men, executives in a hurry, and possibly by his own loving wife, wishing to ensure the "success" of her woolly -headed husband. And hardly as he begins the exercise, he is presented with a certain image which he must emulate or else. An image which asks him to be useful, visible, clear and scientific, among many other things.

This is not a tall order, the writer tells himself, as these are by no means virtues I have eschewed for myself. Till he reads between the lines and begins to understand the implications, in terms of work and attitude, and - if you will pardon me - morals.

On being useful he recalls Baudelaire when he says, ``to be a useful person has always appeared to me as something

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particularly horrible". But he dismisses him as being flippant, as only poets can be and still get away with it. Equally he smiles indulgently at Dostoevosky's man of acute consciousness who considers himself superior to the normal man of action and yet fears him for the unconcealed whip-hand he holds over the "intellectual mouse" holed up in the underground. They were both reacting, albeit strongly, against the bland commonsense and utilitarianism of the nineteenth century - weren't they ? He reasons thus and tells himself that he is a sensible writer, maturing in the late twentieth century who has seen through it all - the global wars and Hiroshimas, and at home the traumas of famine, Partition, Emergency, and what have you. And hence he knows why the robust optimism of the nineteenth, which manifested in India in the neo-romantic colours of liberal humanism, has given way increasingly to mysticism, surrealism, Dadaism, existentialism, etc, the many mushrooming philosophies of anti-thought in the twentieth. Philosophies which could not, after all leave India untouched. So he thinks he is much wiser than his predecessors, and he can carve out his own synthesis in the abundance of freedom, and can still be viable in some market or other, For he is a writer's writer, who must write "nevertheless", so long as the sun warms his living frame, as Camus would say, and shall still be heard.

But, alas, as he stands now at the gateway of the twenty first century in the year of our Freedom Forty, he is told in a dark insidious undertone, barely concealed by the grin, that his choice lies not so much between philosophies, between existentialism *a la* Kierkagaerd and *a la* Camus, between Rabindric beneficence and Dalit anger, between the soulful realism of the ego-centric and the scientific realism of the socio-centric etc, but amounts to whether to be useful in terms of the twenty-first and quit writing literature or b) to be considered useless and esoteric, perhaps honourable if an award comes his way, but never taken seriously.

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Ladies and gentlemen, he realies to his abiding shame and sorrow as a writer that there is no conflict now, not really, in this country between mind A and mind B, not even between Thought and Anti-Thought. The emerging century wants the Indian writer, if he still considers himself one, to cultivate Non-Thought. To forget, as so much nonsense, the ancient saying of the Greek philosopher that "a life not examined is not worth living".

Does he misread the signals ? Or fall for cynicism, the surrogate for wisdom which he has failed to imbibe? And that reveals how far, indeed, he has moved away from the glad confident morning of his youth? Consider the following, in relation particularly to the progress achieved in other fields of human endeavour. Items:

the importance attached to the study of literature in schools, measured in terms either of creative writing or critical debate and discussion.

the ratio of talented and ambitious students in graduate classes of literature to those in other disciplines.

among those who prefer to be in literature, the ratio of girls and housewives from higher middle-class families who have stepped in, primarily, to enhance the alegence of their speech and manners (doesn't' a good quote. if not poetry, enliven the small talk in clubs and drawing rooms?) to boys, being the unfortunate few who have failed to get into the so called practical and professional disciplines.

among those who pass out with degrees in literature, the proportion that opts for teaching and research... and the degree of satisfaction they derive in later life from such options made in haste or compelling circumstances.

the growing and powerful lobby that rejects the study of English literature as being alien, an attitude that seeks to protect and promote mediocrity in our own literatures knowingly or unknowingly, in the guise of patriotism.

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the sale of serious books of literature, creative or critical, exclusive of those commandeered by textbook committees and library foundations, as compared to other books.

the holding of seminars and workshops for serious discussion on literary topics, as distinguished from gala conferences and meetings designed to celebrate, felicitate and honour literary men-cum-events, as a sop to culture.

finally as a coalescing of all the above symptoms, the understanding and appreciation of literature among the certified intellectuals, not to speak of those who have no such pretensions.

And then consider the situation in Orissa, which could not perhaps be worse. Would you still say that the writer I am talking about, is getting a little paranoid about it, consequent to his growing age, isolation or any other circumstance?

A question may perhaps be raised that bad business as it may be, it is no more than a steady deterioration carrying its own logic, explained variously in studies made by Spengler, Aldous Huxley, Orwell, and other such writer-thinkers, which would reverse itself in due course, and so no sharp exclamation in anguish is called for at the turn of the century. I beg to differ. Yes, it has indeed been a downhill phenomenon for quite some time and the century calender is, after all, an artificial divide. But it is my submission that a certain psychological climate, built up assiduously by the leaders of our society, has brought about an acceleration of the trend, which is unnerving. I shall be happy if I am proved wrong.

Talking of acceleration, it is perhaps, more appropriately, the X facter that has come up in recent times to hasten the telescopic process of acceleration that has been taking place in the twentieth century. A heightening of the tempo to get there fast. Nobody

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knows exactly where, but it is assumed that the mode has to be technology, the application of knowledge here and now. You have to apply the various sciences - physical, chemical, mathematical, social, economic biological, behavorial, and what have you, to the instant achievement of results for the sake of a seemingly new discovery in desire, namely human welfare. So why not literature ? Or metaphysics for that matter ? Hence the stress on usefulness. At one level the "use" contemplated is in terms of soothing the tired nerves, tired from the enormity of efforts made by the merchants of progress in fields, factories, and board-rooms. Enter the best-sellers. At another-handed down from social and political platforms-they want the writers to apply their skills directly to the said human welfare, from eradication of poverty to conservation of natural resources, to the abolition of "Sati" which does prompt some obliging square pegs of writers to fit into the round holes placed before them, with results you can well imagine. And these twin tenets of usefulness, it must be remembered, go well beyound the demands of social realism. Because the products are expected to be concrete and visible and material, far removed from the improved quality of life envisioned by Karl Marx, not to speak of radical humanists like Mahatma Gandhi.

Well, one of us may timidly advance the suggestion that a writer thus motivated is a bad writer, what matters is artistic integrity, and that intellectual stimulation, purer the better, is no mean contribution to human Progress, etc, But would he ever be listened to these days-in the "stirring times", if I may repeat myself by either the King or the Demos? You will surely come across umpteen statements glorifying the hallowed tradition or *Aryavarta* that emphasizes thought, beyond even the Platonic vision of thoughts merging into pure thought, but the speaker would seem to wink elsewhere for his truths. Thus the ritual

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paying court to an abominable self-deception, if not hypocrisy, that appears to honour the writer and his literature, but does its best to show him his proper place, To sum up, the message that I find clearly inscribed on the portals of the Twenty first century is, pardon my ageing and faulty eyes: Abandon all Thought those who enter here. For Thought is the first failure of Man.

And when I move around to rest my eyes on the supposedly gentle backwaters of Orissa, the dichotomy is too tragic to be funny. The invoking of values in this land of Lord Jagannath is among the loudest in the country but the manner in which we have been trying to woo and worship "success" could perhaps have been less obscene, to say the least.

There are a few corollaries too to the cult of usefulness which the writer can ignore only at his peril. For one thing, he must be visible, Not many are in a position to do any sustained reading of his work, as the time available to today's man looking forward to the Twenty-first is too precious to be squandered in book - reading, excepting the evidently useful ones. So the writer should take care to be in the public eye, and to explain, on the slightest provocation, whether in a meeting to commemorate past heroes or in a celebrity get together, the gist of what he has been writing about. And such explanation must be suitably capsuled to hold the attention of the listener. In other words, he must be able to fit into the mould of a short Doordarshan feature, in proper audio-visual dimensions. Secondly he must be pretty clear about what he has to say. There is no scope in this braver new world for ironies, evocative undertones, mystic mumbo-jumbo, and such other ambiguities. Poetry must be simple enough to touch your heart, says one critic on behalf of Indianness. Prose must be democratic, says another, in what could be the latest political manifesto on the subject. And if you ignore these pronouncements, you run the risk of being branded as an elitist,

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or as one wallowing miserably in alien philosophies imported from the West.

Friends, I had not meant to be that harsh and over so many pages, on myself. I know only too to well that all that I have said amounts really to self-pity, as I am bonded to my age, whether I like it or not. Possibly I have indulged in a fit of Goyaesque distortion, to invite attention to my anguish. In fact, I had originally thought only of sharing with you my artistic-cum-philosophical resolution (or irresolutions if you will) at the end of a fairly long writing career, for whatever it is worth. I will do so eventually, But I could not help saying something in the beginning, long and eloquent and tiring as it may be, on the present socio-cultural situation that impinges heavily on my literature and yours. The alibii I wish to advance are (a) I could not expect a better forum than this to air my views on the subject. A young and informed audience which would not only excuse my impertinence, appreciate the anguish but do something about it, when it shapes in a few years into many important individuals bent on changing the world-for so long as the feeling lasts. (b) No matter if I am setting out to close my shop, I wanted to invoke an honourable future for the writers to come (I am sure there are quite a few among you who would like to join the guild) who need to be properly read, understood, and criticised or praised, as the case may be, for the right reasons.

May I share with you for a minute, the acute embarassment caused to me sometimes by being praised for the wrong reasons? To name a few: ``Thakura Ghara" offers the reader a wonderful spiritual experience in the person of Bini, the daughter who prays and prays, all by herself, for the recovery of her mother". Imagine my chagrin to find that the reader has totally missed the irony of her prayer, in punch lines that make it obvious that she hated her mother the most, and so did not want to see her dead and

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deifind, with a place of honour for her photo in the prayer-room. Take a few others: "The birds in "Laksha Bihanga" are sexual symbols so cleverly inserted by the writer, as he always does, to expose the dark recesses of the modern mind". "Rati kukura" brings out the vast compassion of the writer for the poor dumb animals". I would not rather comment on these; they are so ridiculously off the mark. And there are many more of this kind which have made me weep, but I could rather spare you from. What is evident from these pronouncements is that the intelligent reader was in too much of a hurry either to read the story as it ought to be read, or to exercise his intelligence. Thus I was not overly surprised the other day, when I heard somebody saying in his speech that the emphasis on a hackneyed theme like love in Ramakanta Rath's Sriradha is unfortunate, as it jars on the sensibility of the modern mind waiting to receive the twenty-first Century.

So much for the modern wonders of the Twenty first Century!

Now let me place myself in your hands, as a writer, with a few of my views and attitudes with reference to life and literature. They may perhaps be considered as final. for as William Saroyan said, "At sixty it is not in order to repudiate one's years". And I will be completing sixty four in a few days. Thus you will find that what all I would be saying bears the unmistakable imprint of my works, my self-induced triumphs and failures, howsoever tentative they may be-thanks to the wretched brevity of human life that must always remain a draft, awaiting revision and improvement.

To start with, let me imbibe the confidence for your sake and mine-sorry for the repetition-that I am not afraid of the twenty-first century. Not the nervous and defiant gesture in honour of Virginia Woolfe, but the calm confidence of a *Samskara* that has come down since the beginning of Man and inheres in me, that it is mind and mind alone that ennobles the Naked Ape, and

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anything, hi-tech or no-tech, that tends to degrade it must go. It is in this belief that I venture to make the following personal statements, arrogant and unfashionable as some of them may appear to be.

I am proud to be a practitioner of the literary arts. Whatever may be the complexes and motivations that have impelled me to write, I am glad to have taken it up as my vocation in life. For it provides me with a certain window to consciousness that I do not find in any other form of human endeavour barring the spiritual. But as an art form, is it petrified by language, as some theorists maintain, and hence inferior to other forms such as music and painting? I do not think so. The sheer presumptuouness of the written word in its bid to capture the indescribable mystery of the world is the farthest essay in heroism given to an artist. And tragic too, by the same token, as with the legendary nightingable that bled to the ultimate in pain and ecstasy, so as to bring forth the red rose.

As a writer, I am an aristocrat, for I swear by the primacy of Thought. Thought that isolates itself necessarily from the market place, so that it may achieve maximum efficiency in studying "them poor devils", the human species. It is a pathetic pretension to superiority, but essential to the writing of my literature. So I refuse to be swayed by the so-called democratic commands to do this and do that for the suffering humanity. For heaven's sake, I plead, let me think and think about them and for them, but well removed from their surface needs and apetites, like the parent who distances himself from a petulant child, for its own good. In the process, I can decipter the human condition a little better-or so I hope. It follows that I consider *Jana-sahitya* a contradiction in terms. Surely the *Jana* must have their bread and circus too, but they must graduate in slow and steady measure, to an understanding of the supposedly abstruse scriptures I am writing

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for them, to fulfill their higher needs hoping they would shame me in due course to my inadequacies as a thinker. It is for the govt, the academicians and others to create the infrastructure by which they can beat me at my own game, But I shall not descend, more for their sake than mine.

The Thought I profess to espouse as a writer is married irrevocably to the uniqueness of a living man, that is my own self-howsoever slippery it may be in its multiple emotional and intellectual dimensions. In other words, my thoughts are not outside of one who thinks them, and are hence conditioned and distinctive. Same goes for my characters I seek to become. This does not devalue my truths, for I believe that only such relative truths given to individuals are real, in so far as they apply to the term "human condition", though I seek and hope to see them sometime in an universal mould. Well, it would appear to be the Existential approach to perception, as distinguished from the Ideal, but I do not subscribe to any "ism", philosophical or otherwise, My basic plea is that no creative writer can be both honest and properly objective in his thought—perceptions. I prefer to be honest.

Analytical as I tend to be when the authorial voice takes over. I aspire to intensities of experience for my characters, Such that they may receive and exult in high-voltage charges of both thoughts and emotions, and simultaneously, if need be. I won't deny that it could be my own secret wish too. For I believe that a man lives only in his intenser moments, moments in which he is apt to feel that he is the sole and rightful heir to an wonderful universe, howsoever short-lived the feeling may be. And if that does not provide him with glimpses of "realised truth", almost spiritual but for its shaky foundations, nothing ever will. That is how I share the wish of Nadine Gordimer, the story-teller, that my story may turn a hole into the page-with intensities. Of life - giving drops

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like sweat, tear, semen and saliva as she would ask for , or any other.

Talking of the suffering humanity it has been my conviction that while the suffering caused by social iniquities and economic disparities is obvious, it is not often recognised that the distress cannot be removed by amending the system or replacing one by another, for so long as man remains the strangely self-deceiving and self-righteous animal that he is. I have found it utterly amazing that from the poorest peasant sold on the morals of Ramayana to the secular intellectual swearing by the Constitution, each one of us, almost, is opposed to falsehood, deceit, injustice, corruption, violence etc. etc., and yet none of these vices have ever even attempted to take a flight from the society. Many gods have failed, and martyrs laid to eternal rest by words and worship. And since vices, that is wrongdoings, are bound to cause sorrow to somebody or other, it has always been a sad sad world, when one sits down to think about it in the intervals of conflict. I must confess I have not been able to square the illogic, suicidal as it is, by any known law, except to conclude that it is in-built in the nature of man, who cannot bear looking inside himself. Hence my penchant for self-analysis, almost masochistic, as one critic has said. So also my allergy to heroes and villains in any social situation, knowing as I do the subtle modes of oppression practised by each one of us, cleverly or clumsily, knowingly or unknowingly, on the other man in self-interest. This is not to say that I am amoral or I have little passion for social justice. On the contratry I am an ardent believer on both counts. And if statements have to be made for record, I consider socialism to be a system more satisfying in moral and aesthetic terms than any other. But unfortunately when it comes to individuals, the system takes a back seat, and I cannot for the life of me locate my Ramas and Ravanas-they are so hopelessly mixed up ! Thus I have failed to

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be properly angry in my literature. Sorry, but I cannot help it. I would rather be mad at myself for my ineptitude, than eschew the truths as I see them.

Do I have better luck with family and other interpersonal relationships ? I am afraid not. It is either a dull unremitting gray as Andre Gide would ask us to expect or a kaleidoscopic canvas that eludes definition. Thus though I do not share the wisdom or sophistication of a Camus to say that "anything that adds to the nobility in man makes him look a little more absurd", I have drawn a blank in my search for pure or atleast three quarters heroes/villains in real life, absurd or otherwise. However there is a saving grace at the non-social level, for here I have greater reasons to be amused than angry. An individual can always oscillate between love and hate, jealousy and sympathy, and what have you, and can still count the blessings of his illusions and fantasies, but I cannot ask the same of a socially deprived man. So while I am indeed unhappy over my failure as a writer who could not be properly angry over the social situation. I am not too unhappy over my failure as a writer who could not be a purveyor of light and love and sweetness for my cousin next door. I tell my readers that there are moments and moments and truths are always double – edged. So why blame me for my ambiguities, when there is every possibility that you will find the lady rather than a tiger in the cage? Doesn't the uncertainty tickle you? Don't you find it vastly amusing, if not fascinating ? etc. And I gloat over my generous parting shot, - wait for the intenser moment won't you?

Understandably some consider me as a sour intellectual who is unable to see the brighter side of things. A reader once wrote to me with his heart overflowing with compassion."-Dear Kishori Babu, couldn't you ever learn to love some one? Even yourself ?" I was reminded of what Father Zossima had said in "Brothers

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Karamazov", that there is no greater sorrow given to man than being unable to love. "Did I really belong to that rare species of the handicapped ?" I wrote back, pleading an emphalic "Not Guilty". And I tried to explain that on the contrary, I have always been asking for the true and pure, and hence my impatience with the tinsel stuff that glitters and attempts to fool me, not knowing that I am a writer. I wonder if he was satisfied, but he did not renew the charge. Be that as it may, I cannot make do with half - truths and pass them off as the genuine article. I believe (don't ask me why) in the higher destiny of man, in a teleological framework as with Plato, or through a process of transcendence as with Sri Aurobindo. Neverthless I would rather do it the hard way and plumb the depths of ungainly mud that holds the lotus together even as it woos the sun, so as to get to know the divine flower in its complete and integrated dimensions. I know that my life-time is much too limited for the ambitious exercise. I wish I could be a *Sadhaka* (seer) and take a quantum leap beyond intellect. But since I am not one, I would rather be the honest pedestrian of a writer who hopes to reach the golden gates some time, some day, possibly in many rebirths, as Ramakrushna Paramhamsa has assured all seekers, than take to short cuts in subterfuge for instant comfort.

On second thoughts I should not have fought shy of your asking me why I believe in transcendence. No, it is not entirely a matter of belief. Did I not refer a little while ago to the magic of intenser moments? There is no subterfuge in them, has never been, either for me or my characters. They are also an essential part of my pedestrian but perceived reality, and have made me realise the virtue of a saying by Swami Vivekandnda that human consciousness is but a thin film that lies between oceans of the subconscious and the superconscious. So, much as I have presumed to travel in the subterranean chambers with the help of searchlights

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provided to me – be it experience, Freud, and whatever, I can claim to have had those intenser moments, as most men are likely to have, when the "sea flows in your veins, and the stars are your jewels,". But, alas, they are mere glimpses, intimations of immortality as you may call them, and you cannot follow them up with the flawed tools of intellect. Spiritualism is an experience, howsoever fletting it may be, that races past my puny truths, and makes me feel that man is indeed transcendent and can reach to levels of understanding that equates illumination, when the craving of malcontents like me for true and pure love etc. can atleast be fulfilled. But could I as a writer attempt to deal with these glimpses in grater detail, so that a path may well be charted for the benefit of myself and others ? Pity, it cannot be done. The experience cannot be prolonged or deepened at will, for so long as I operate within my "normal", i.e. the mundane frame-work of life, and surely I cannot browbeat my creature imagination without foundations of fact. But if at all I do, and that is a big `if', I am lost as a writer. Because no grain of salt that ventures into the sea can ever come back to tell the tale, to quote another parable from the store house of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. However every writer needs the blessings of his readers that he may never disappoint the likes of the old Dr. Oreshchenkov in Solzhentsyn's Cancer Ward, when he says, "The meaning of existence is to preserve untarnished, undisturbed and undistorted the image of eternity which each person is born with- as far as possible- like a silver moon in a calm still pond".

I shall await the blessings. For at the end of my story an absurd death negates life, and its playthings such as literature. And asks me to say hello to some nothingness. A rich nothingness, thanks to the many truths I have sought to unveil with my vaunted literature, but a nothingness nevertheless, The silver moon in still so distant-cool, cruel, and tantalizing.

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But this excruciating agony is perhaps the final reward for a writer. That is how I feel as I look back upon my works, and stand in a confessional such as this, to share with you my fears, anxieties and obstinacies, as also my supposed triumphs and failures. I am immensely grateful for the opportunity thus given to me. And I do hope that between you and me-and that includes our successors-we can contain the centuries. Thank you.

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BANKIMCHANDRA'S INFLUENCE ON ORIYA LITERATURE

It was only the other day, as it seems, that my friend and *guru*, the late Gopinath Mohanty engaged me in a lively debate over the relative merits of Bankimchandra and Sarat Chandra, while talking generally about Bengali literature. Gopinath Babu was of the view that Bankimchandra has helped to enhance the image of man, and, in particular, the Indian man, whereas Sarat Chandra has spared no pains to diminish him, in his anxiety to rehabilitate all the weaklings and sinners of the world. It was perhaps a deliberately extreme position that one happens to take in a debate, but it was good enough to incite me to a passionate defence of Sarat Babu, an ideal of my early youth. He treats his characters as human beings, I said, for what they really are, and in utmost sympathy, and not as images. So what you are saying about enhancing the image of man is no more than a vainglorious and fatuous exercise. So on and so forth. The sparks flew like nobody's business, and one of the most effective ones that hurt me was-This is what is wrong with you people, who swear by realism. Do you have to be so paranoid over the merits of the warts, wounds and sores, real as they may be, forgetting that the entire thing is still beautiful, as it should be and is no less real ? I could not be silenced thus and had my answers ready. But the point I am trying to make here is that no less a writer than Gopinath Mohanty, who left us only a few years ago, was smitten by Bankimchandra and his philosophy The undying image of man, noble and beautiful. The reality that must survive,

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notwithstanding all the petty realities that some of us are happy to discover and expose.

I must confess that as a writer I do not subscribe to this philosophy. The body-cum-soul beautiful is a myth, if I have to reckon with the ugly sores. But I love it nevertheless, and I have no use for the false realism of an image to put up my self-esteem. But Gopinath Mohanty thought otherwise. And what is more relevant for the purpose of the present discourse is that his writings also reflect this odd and wonderful adherence to the glorious image of man, which was rescued, as it were, in Indian literature, by Bankimchandra and a few others in the springtime of Indian Renaissance - in a framework of intellectual understanding as distinct from an exercise in faith that characterised our earlier poetic and dramatic works, as some would say. Gopinath mohanty belongs spiritually to the generation of Bankimchandra. And this I consider, is a most surprising fact of the influence exercised by him over all these decades, in the background of all that has happened in Bengal, Orissa, and in our country in general, since Bankimchandra had lived and died and written his epic novels. All the petty and shameful things caused by man to man which would shame any image contrived by words, howsoever powerful they may be. But when we look for some visible influence of Bankimchandra on Oriya literature, particularly in the writings of those who came immediately after him we are likely to take a little too long over it. It may even appear, at times, to be a laboured exercise, and not worth the effort. And this is not surprising, for no self-respecting writer who is trying to break free from a cultural dominance and is seeking to create something which he can call truly as his own, would do it in the manner of a camp-follower. On the other hand, he is likely to do something strikingly different, to establish his separate identity, in no uncertain terms.

Thus it is no wonder that Fakirmohan Senapati The acknowledged father of modern Oriya fiction who came after

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Bankimchandra in point of time, appears, on the face of it, as a writer who is totally different from him in what he says and how he says it-incorrigibly earthy and plebeian to the sonorous and dignified prose of Bankimchandra, and much too flippant with his mordant humour compared to the philosophic insights of Bankimchandra. It would be entirely wrong to say that Fakir mohan was not too fond of Bengali literature of those days that made the rounds in Orissa, which was essentially Bankimchandra, Vidyasagar, and Michael Madhusudan Dutta. Contemporary Bengali literature was, in fact, his inspiration, and he is on record that whenever he saw a new Bengali book, he turned it lovingly, from page to page, and wondered when one such book would come out in Oriya. Yet it would not be illogical to imagine that his penchant for "Tadbhava" Oriya words in preference to "Tatsama" words which would be closer to Bengali, and the passionate detail in which he depicted the manners and morals of the Orissa countryside, was also a response that came naturally to him in his anxiety to forge a literature which was distinctively "Oriya" in tone and flavour.

It was indeed a painful situation that our fore-runners had to contend with. Was a language such as Oriya that evolved from Magadhi Prakrit at about the same time as Bengali and had a rich tradition of poetic literature to be treated thus by the new rulers, that is, relegated to the status of a local language? Even, horror of horrors, being asked to prove that it was no offshoot of Bengali, a motivated lie that was being spread in some quarters ? Yet the fact remains that they had to look across the northern borders of Orissa to feel the glow of Indian Renaissance, and the consequent new writing that did us proud as Indians. No matter if it seemed unfair that the cultural resurgence should have come to Orissa, thus, in the aftermath of the first happening elsewhere, just because it came to be the first nerve-centre of British India, when those foreign masters began to settle down as benign conquerors and win us over by their culture too, through rulers such as Lord

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William Bentick and Lord Macaulay. Hence this strange phenomenon of a conscious distancing from the influence of Bengali literature in spite of admiring it in no small measure, in the second half of nineteenth century in Orissa. Or perhaps not so strange, for was not the Indian Renaissance, itself, a product of the resentment against the attempted dominance of British culture wedded to an admiration for some of the liberal values it did pass on to us, which prompted us to recover our own pristine values?

And so the literary effulgence of Bankimchandra could not be resisted by Fakirmohan or some of those who came after him, even as the overt cultural dominance of Bengali literature had to be countered and eventually overcome.

The choice of words and the style in Fakirmohans prose was no doubt different from Bankimchandra's, as chalk from cheese. And the downright rural background of his fiction, in its outrageously intimate detail, was no echo of the other. But what about the thematic content? Could it not be said that the proud Bengali and Indian in Bankimchandra, and the proud Oriya and Indian in Fakirmohan found common ground in the new-found glow of Renaissance, to battle against the forces alien to Indianness, as also to the dignity that inheres in the common man, exploited for so long by his masters, foreign and Indian? The overseas ruler and the native oppressor, basking in his favour were both evil, and it was time everybody knew about it and did whatever was needed to be done. Bankimchandra had, I would say, led the onslaught for all Indian writers to come after him, in so far as words could serve as weapons, to storm the dreaded Bastille, and it cannot be gainsaid that it has helped much more than could perhaps have been imagined at that time.

First, the scorn for the foreign ruler, in a manner that hurts. Here is a passage from ``Anand Math", which I would like to read out in the original Bengali, for greater effect:

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Sahib: You are a very spirited woman. I appreciate your courage. Come to my bungalow. Your husband is certain to be killed in the battle. Thereafter yours.....

Shanti: Now let there be a bet between you and me. The battle will certainly start in two or there days: If you win I will be your concubine, I accept, But if we win are you prepared to eat bananas from my hand as a monkey in my court?

Sahib: Eating banana is good. Do you have it now?

Shanti: Who would like to talk to such an uncivilsed fellow? (throwing the gun away Shanti goes away laughing).

(Chapter 2, part III, Anand math)

I supposed there are not many such passages in Indian literature that express the sheer contempt of a conquered race for its rulers in such a telling manner. Fakirmohan was more sarcastic than contemptuous in his portrayal of the sahib, but it was abundantly clear that he considered them too, as some uncouth monkeys who had no business to guide the destinies of a civilised race. So much for the cultural domination fondly hoped for by Macaulay and his tribe!

But scorn gets you nowhere with the native oppressor, whether he is a lackey of the British Raj or the purely home grown variety, the village zamindar or moneylender. He had to be opposed, tooth and nail. Period With Bankimchandra the cause required a certain spiritual-cum-heroic dimension where as with Fakirmohan it remained at a more realistic level asking for divine retribution as also justice from the courts, and above all the sympathy of the reader-as one compares Bankimchandra's ``Anand math" or ``Devi Chaudhurani" to Fakirmohan's ``Chha man Atha Gunth". But the message was clear in both, that the evildoer had to be punished. Enough was enough. As Bhabananda tells Mahendra Singha in Anand Math,.. ``Look you, the snake crawls on the

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ground, and is the lowest of living things, but put your foot on the snake's neck and even he will rise with lifted hood. Can nothing overthrow the patience of the long-suffering Indians, and in particular the lowly and poor among them ?" This was the cry to freedom that went out to the people of India with the expressive prose of both. The intolerable oppression of the landowner that prompted Bhabani Thakur to take to dacoity in Devi Chaudhurani and the vicious deeds of Ramacandra Mangaraj that drove the simpleton victim of a Bhagia to lose his mind and bite his tormentor, as in "Chha Man Atha Guntha", are both pointers to the urgent need for action to remedy the wrongs. And it is but reasonable to presume that Fakir mohan was inspired by Bankimchandra to say it loud and clear, as none else had said earlier, to the tune of "Bande Mataram", which was a clarion call to freedom, in every sense of the term. This trend set by Fakirmohan to focus on the socio-political iniquities (later, it became socio-economic) has persisted for far too long in Oriya fiction, ignoring the inter-personal relationships which are no less responsible for the tragedies of the human condition in modern India.

Was Fakirmohan also influenced by Bankimchandra in the art and craft of fiction, which was a newer mode of writing literature in India? Were there any full-blooded historical romances in either literature before they arrived on the scene? What prompted Fakirmohan to write "Lachhama", a historical romance if there was one, which is so different from his "Chha Man and Atha Gunth"? Could the fatal Kundanandini in Bankimchandra's "Bishabriksha" have inspired Fakir Mohan's piece of land measuring six acres, and eight gunths, the way they caused disasters in the respective households? And what about the crafted plot-structures, bold characterisations, and the techniques of a satisfying resolution that we find, in their fiction ? One cannot escape the conclusion that while these were pioneering trends in the fictional art of both the masters, the younger Fakir Mohan, an avowed admirer

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of Bengali Literature could most likely have been influenced by Bankimchandra just as both could have taken a cue from the English novel of the nineteenth century. And hence the similarities, that cannot escape the eyes of the researcher.

Talking of the narrative fiction of both, I am tempted to advance a point of view that while neither of them was guilty of realism, as we understand the term in the modern context, they did subscribe to the importance of realistic details of the scene and atmosphere in which the characters perform the acts. There is certainly a departure here from the classic mould in which there were *Lakshman Rekhas* in terms of aesthetic propriety that you could cross only at your own peril. Consider for example, the following examples from Bankimchandra's Kapalakundala and Fakirmohan's "Chha Man Atha Guntha:"

...Bones pierced their soles as they walked. At one fall of Nabakumar's foot a water-filled urn broke into pieces. A dead body lay inside it- nobody had cremated this wretched one. Their feet touched it. While Kapalkundala went around the corpse, Nabakumar trampled upon it. All around, carrion-eating animals roamed. At the approach of the two human beings, some of them raised shrill cries, some came to attack them, while other slunk away with squelching footsteps (Last Chapter, Kapala Kundala)

The night was so dark that one could not see one's own body. The south wind blew, howling loudly. The rain fell outside, downpour after downpour. Like a mountain of darkness the banayan tree swayed making fearful noises. Like small pieces of darkness the bats flew about and clung again to the heap of darkness. Still others like bits of blackness, rose out of the heap to fly about in the sky and eat banayan berries with squeaking cries...(Chapter 22, Chhaman Atha Guntha)

Such "squelching footsteps" and "squeaking cries", are wonderfully new sounds for me in the early hours of modern

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fiction in both the languages, and one cannot salute Bankimchandra for, perhaps, having led the way.

I have dwelt at length on Fakirmohan not only because he shares with Bankimchandra the distinction of being the first major novelist in his mother-tongue and came immediately after the Bengali master, but also because his prose appears so different on the face of it. But some others who came after Fakirmohan, and were equally keen to instal Oriya literature in its own pedestal could not, ! think, avoid the look-alike effect, given the literary ambience of the times. Thus Radhanath Ray, the first Oriya poet to break free from the tradition of an overly stylistic and ornate poetry of "Reeti Juga", appears to have been influenced by Bankimchandra and Vidyasagar in his prose writings, limited as they might be. But he was more verbose than stately in his choice of words and phrases, and quite often stilted in his expressions. Critics have ascribed this to his using the wrong Bankimchandra as his model, namely his early writings married to the inelegance of missonary Oriya prose. And then we have "Bhakta Kavi" Madhusudan Rao, the great Brahmo reformer and poet who recalls Bankimchandra with his highly reflective prose, delivered in a tone of high mindedness, though Vidyasagar more than Bankimchandra seems to have been his ideal in this respect. While with Ramashankar Ray, one of our pioneers in the field of dramatic literature, the influence is too obvious to be missed in his prose-writings, and particularly in his novel "Bibasini", a historical romance which takes after Bankimchandra in more ways than one-from the romance-mystery combine in a historical perspective, down to the use of sannyasis and dacoits as harbingers of justice. There could have been a few more I suppose, in the decades following Bankimchandra whose works might have borne the imprint of the great Bengali writer, in the eyes of an assiduous scholar.

But I would rather go back to my quarrel with Gopinath Mohanty. Because It is there that the battle lines are drawn

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between two distinct streams in modern Indian literature, and prose literature in particular-from the glorious days of Bankimchandra to the consciously realistic and no-holds-barred literature that many of us write and swear by, now in Orissa, Bengal and elsewhere in India. And in my view the long shadow cast by Bankimchandra goes beyond the art and craft of fiction-theme, plot, structure, style and what have you-and has conditioned, the psyche of many Indian writers, to write with a certain philosophical bias in favour of man. With Bankimchandra man is naturally transcendent, for that is how he has been programmed in the divine scheme of things. And so while the responses may vary in any given situation, personal or social, they refer to a self-image which is indubitably heroic. Tragic if it needs be so, and you may call him a failure too, but he is still resplendent in the way he works out his mission. Whereas on the other side, there are writers, writing in various shades of humanism, romanticism and realism, who are much too conscious about the many unloveable truths of the human condition as are perceived in actual experience, caused by society or by his own genes, and so make no bones about writing it out in the cruellest detail. Yet they ask you to love the small and pitiable man. For, you may not consider him a hero and respect him, never mind his ridiculous attempts to be heroic for a change, but isn't he entitled to your love and sympthy as a fellow-being, knowing as you do your own predicament ?

Bankimchandra had blazed the trail for the heroic man. And perhaps appropriately so in an age when it was but necessary for him to awake and arise, for that was the spirit of Renaissance. And it lighted the way for many Indian writers to come after him, Premchand for one in Hindi literature, and quite a few in Orissa, including two major writers of our time, namely Kalindicharan Panigrahi and Gopinath Mohanty.

Take for example, "Kapal Kundala" essentially a love - story. The undying love of Padmabati for Nabakumar the husband lost

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to her, the intense, love of Nabakumar for Kapal Kundala, the sannyasini, and the sympathetic, almost motherly love of Kapalkundala that reveals itself at the end of the narrative are all made of the same metal. Nobelness. But human love, howsoever. ennobling, is also tainted generally with a certain selfishness. So Kapalkundala with all her tenderness for Nabakumar tells him that he had come to the river ghat to make a sacrifice of her life to the goddess Bhabani, and she does it. And Nabakumar jumps into the river after her, and the two drift away to some heavenly union, that the author has left unsaid, Love can transcend itself. You can also very well renounce family life for a cause, as the "Children of the Mother" did in "Anandmath". And Bhabananda who fell into the error of love with Kalyani had to atone for it by the supreme sacrifice of dying for the cause in a batle with the British Army. Again in "Debi Chaudhurani" the woman in Prafulla does cry her heart out for the love denied to her, hut she has first to transcend, against all odds, the circumstance of her life, towards a status of power; and when she stoops, as she does finally, it is only to conquer.

They may well cause difficulties to each other and to the outside world, but they are virtuous-the central characters-in their own reckoning, conforming to the self-image of man, the Idea, as distinguished from the nondescript everyday man, who has no claim to be an Individual. Thus both Satyananda in "Anandmath" and Bhabani Thakur in "Debi Choudhurani" have no qualms for doing wrong things, for they have causes to serve which justify them to themselves. And the loving husband Brajeswar who wrongs Prafulla is motivated by the tenets of *Pitadharmah pitaswarga* which are more compelling than love. Even Sagar, the second co-wife of Prafulla is more than a sister to her and instructs her a lesson or two in the transcendent qualities of love when she says; "Brajeswar is not there to make me cry. My Brajeswar is heaven".

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Now Kalindicharan Panigrahi, coming after about five decades of Bankimchandra could not care less about placing his 'men of clay' Matira manisha in an unfamiliar casing of gold, that endures, akin to the *Niskama Karma* cultivated and nearly realised by many central characters in Bankimchandra's fiction. Baraju, the noble elder brother in "Matira Manisha" would rather leave the house, bag and baggage and leave it all to the henpecked younger brother, rather than allow it to be divided. He won't stand up for his rights, that is quite a plebeian thought, nor moved by considerations of love and duty for his family, when it comes to conserving the ideal of a House Undivided. And didn't that cause that weakling of a brother to shed penitent tears when he begs him to return home ? For as, one lamp lighteth another, nobleness enkindleth nobleness. Just as in his twin novels "Muktagadara Kshudha" and "Amar Chita", Sanatan, champion of the Prajas transforms Landa Babu, the tyrant, to Subhakanta, the benevolent Raja, who even begs the judge to favour him with the same punishment when his new-found comrade is sentenced to death for a justifiable murder. Such are indeed the ways of the transcendent man, a status that belongs naturally and inevitably to each one of us, the author seems to say.

Gopinath Mohanty nearer our times had no special reasons for dreams of grandeur for the individual man or the man-in-society. But almost all his protagonists are *Amrutar Santan* (Children of Immortality) and so they can well overcome their suffering with rare stoicism like Sukru Jani in "Paraja" or consume their unfulfilled love like Rabi and Chhabi in "Mati Matala" in the greater passion for social work.

Gopinath does not belong to the realists, nor did Bankimchandra, who seems to have started it all. But we need them not merely as counterpoints but as catalysts of hope, against hope, as we come to reflect on the future of mankind. Could it be, after all, that the existential *angst* suffered by the modern man runs parallel to the spiritual *angst* that inheres in the children

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of Amrit, in their bid to regain the inheritance, denied to them for so long? A noted Hindi critic had said that in a culture more philosophically than psychologically oriented, the destiny of a modern writer is bound to be painful, for his personal and literary responses cannot but come into conflict with certain traditions rooted in the Indian psyche. But the pain itself is a perceived truth of my consciousness, and I can neither deny nor ignore it. And so Bankimchandra who built on this tradition forcefully-as a writer of excellence and not a philosopher or mystic-continues to be relevant for me, as he would be, perhaps, to every sensitive Indian writer, for all times to come.

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TOWARDS PERCEPTIONS OF AN UNREAL WORLD

Education aims at the making of a complete man. The complete man is a cultural man. The final statement that sums up thus, the plea contained in the base paper for "Education though Art" is unexceptionable. I would therefore crave the indulgence of the learned audience to introduce only a few thoughts by way of emphasis on certain aspects of the proposition. And in this may I take off from the brilliant paradox put forward by Prof Bogden Suchodolvi that "the real man is formed through contact with the unreal world of art"?

What is this unreal world ? I suggest that the expanding horizons of the mind which are revealed to us through a creative activity, both in the acts of creation and response, are the ever receding contours of this fascinating world. They tempt us, but do not tempt us enough, so as to sustain the activity over the best part of our lives, and we are obliged to withdraw at the slightest interaction of the so-called cold realities. Unless of course the creative activity is also absorbed into the market place and Art is reduced to the status of a commodity. This is the crax of the situation. How to succumb to the temptation true and proper, and never look back.

Now to define a creative activity. I would venture to suggest that essentially, it is an exercise of the mind in terms of a) Imagination and b) Intelligence. And I submit that we are not

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able to sustain it in the desired manner because i) we are not sufficiently aware idealogically, of its importance in the scheme of human affairs, and (ii) we are not able to manage a proper mix of the two ingredients reformed to above, in carrying out the activity, Thus while we do recognise that the ordinary consciousness we live with most of the time, is a poor, rather infinitesmal fraction of the rated capacity of the mind, and it is but commonsense to work towards its expansion and enrichment though an activity which also pleases us, we are half-indined to endorse the truth of an witticism from Oscar wilde, a professed artist that "All art is non-sense", as also to fall in with the supposed scientific truth propounded by Freud and his followers that Art is an escape from Reality.

Yes, we do practise and promote some Art to relieve the bordom of our lives. We are moved by the music of words, the magic of color, the sinuous forms, lines, curves, and what have you and we consider, rightly enough, that it is no sin to enjoy them Fine. But we are unable to pursue the logic of the evocations and reverberations, which would take us deeper and farther into the unreal world. And if at all there are moments of ecstasy we are favoured with, they are like the depression on a velvet cushion, to quote Ramakrushna Paramahamsa, when we sit on it, that disappears the moment we leave the seat. What I am driving at is that if Art is to be our golden gateway to the unreal world we are aspiring to in order that it renders us whole, it must be abiding. It must inhere. In other words the sensuous delights must be of a material that would translate eventually into intellectual, and in due course, to spiritual perception. But this does not usually happen. For one thing, as I have already said, the ideological commitment is weak, and secondly the mix of Imagination and intelligence is more often than not lop-sided.

And I do not have to labour the point that the situation right now,as at the end of the twentieth century is worse than ever

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before, thanks to the siren song of a material cum-mechanical world which is overwhelming and would not leave you alone. But one hopes that the Indian citizen, late in the race, can still save himself. So why not seize time by the forelock, and catch them young-our children, boys and girls and young adults, when they are yet to be corrupted ? The world is still beautiful, the fantasies are for real, and the wonders of pure joy and pure sorrow are exhilarating through the fragile moments of experience, This I suppose is the validity of the present exercise on the 125th both anniversary of Mahamta Gandhi and denotes a particular urgency in the context of the rot that has advanced far enough in the social body politic of our times. But we will be failing in our task, unless the practice and promotion of Art helps the child right in the beginning to an awareness of its supreme importance the scheme of things; and the relatively easy flights of Imagination are suitably tempered by Intelligence, in a manner that does not stay his hands but helps him to the habit of discrimination and a proper sense of direction.

I would leave aside the ideological commitment in so far as it relates to a child. It should grow in him I imagine, as he moves along in the process of education though Art, with the correct priorities woven into it. However his joyous flights of imagination need to be piloted by Intelligence. That is all I ask.

What do I mean by Intelligence ? Not cleverness that feeds the instinct of survival. On the other hand it is a product of thought which is the first failure of mankind, as a philosopher has put it. A man senses failure when he cannot react to a situation instantly; he pauses for understanding. It is an extension of such pauses which involves effort, and is relevant only to a human being that I am talking about. And about the importance of understanding, as a basis of action and behaviour, even as he enters the unreal world of perceptions, propelled initially by the forces of imagination.

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It is not an easy exercise. We would not have come to such a sorry pass, if it were so. It is hampered mainly by two negative forces that often masquerade as virtue. One is the wrong notion that the grand passions which are an aid to Imagination are inhibited by intelligence. And what is worse, such passions can be self-destructive when the individual mind pays court to group-consciousness and thus escapes moral responsibility that would normally attach to an individual's conduct. To quote Another Koestler "the continuous disasters in man's history are mainly due to his excessive capacity and urge to become identified with a tribe, nation, church or cause, and to espouse its credo uncritically and enthusiastically, even if its tenets are contrary to reason. In other words, man's tragedy is not an excess of aggression, but an excess of devotion". Witticism apart, that goes with a paradoxical statement for added effect, is, it far from truth in the times such as ours when fundamentalism has taken over from the fundamentals that matter in the life of an individual as also of a nation ? And can we really say that the child as he grows into manhood is immune to such influences in the society ? On that Art is not harnessed often enough, to implant such devotions in a child's mind ?

The second negative force that is even more powerful and adhesive is self-righteousness. The defence mechanism that justifies a man to himself, almost as a God-given article of faith, that I am necessarily in the right - myself, my language, my caste, my community, so on and so forth and the "other" is in the wrong. And hence the strange contradiction that has always baffled me is that while each one of us, barring may be a microscopic few, has a sharp sense of right and wrong and, by and large refuses to accept the psychological dictum that the `colour of thuth is gray', and he is himself conscious of the indubitable fact that he is in the right, the world is steadly going from bad to worse.

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Talking of self righteousness, and conversely the need for self-introspection, who could be a better guide to or conduct than Mahamta Gandhi ? His experiments with Truth that continued all through his life, his confessions to "Himalayan blunders", the fasts he imposed on himself to purge his soul of the dark shadows that had crept in, inspite of himself, are illustrations-If such illustrations are needed-of the assiduous exercise of intelligence which he never allowed to loosen its hold on him in his emotive adherence to the values he shared with his countrymen or co-religionists, Imagine a man, who was a devont Hindu and died with "He Ram" on his lips, saying that while he had the greatest respect for the Vedas and the holy seriptunes he did not consider them as God's own words, any more than the Bible and the Koran and Zord Avastha, and he would not hesitate to deviate from its precepts, if he found them to be in conflict with the values he had come to cherish in his own search for Truth.

To sum up: Cultivation of Intelligence which is kept away from (a) the emotive snare of group-loyalities that is, expanded selfishness, and (b) self-righteousness, ie, sanctified selfishness is the primary need of the hour and must be an essential element in drawing out plans for education through art, with a view to take the virgin mind deeper and farther into the wonders of an unreal world. If at all we hope the coming generations to usher in a better world, which has been messsed up by their elders.

Coming to the nitty-gritty of plans and programmes which would inform the practice and promotion of Art with a large size approach in Intelligence, I have no quarrel with the itemised schedule given in the base paper. Being a mere writer and not an educationist, I do not have the professional competence to improve upon it. Yet I would venture to submit only a few extra dimensions to the admirable structure that has been worked out, in the light of what I have said earlier. Thus while every facility should be provided to a child, as he grows into manhood, to give free play

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to his creative urges it will be desirable to inject into the process the value-added element, progressively, at suitable stages of his development by making him (a) explain his creations, expressions or discoveries, (b) explain his preferences, given a set of such artifacts or acquisitions, and (c) submit himself to interactions in peer groups, monitored by recognised experts.

In concrete terms I suggest the following action items for consideration

The "show-and tell" device as is followed at the primary stage of education in certain countries. Let the child show something new or interesting, and tell the adult teacher/ parents why he considers it to be so.

prompting him at the secondary stage to explain his preferences between a cluster of such articles, by telling good from the bad, beautiful from the ugly, or joyous from the sad, It is never too early to guard against the begniling charms of *Kitsh* as distinguished from Art.

group sessions for discussing the various points of view.

Obligatory courses in Appreciation of Art in its various departments such as plastic arts, performing arts, literature etc., at the higher secondary stage. This should include studies in the inter-action between various forms of Art, as also between Arts and Science.

Seminars and workshops to be conducted by universities, literary institutions, and cultural wings of the State where in-depth discussions would be held on the past and current artists and their works, and develop in the process the norms of value-Judgment which would he in keeping with the dynamics of our socio-cultural values.

Some of these methods are already a part of the system. But I have no hesitation in saying that there is a scope for doing much

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more that what is being done today, so that the faculties of thought-perception, appreciation through discrimination, and a vibrant interplay of ideas so developed, would come to be integral elements in the cultural life of our nation, cutting across the banal compulsions of a materialistic society which cannot be wished away. So much so, that the joys of intellectual understanding, even ecstasies of intellectual "Eureka"s would always be present in the agenda of happiness of an average member of the intelligentia no matter if he is also prone to enjoy the audio-visual soaps on television in his moments of relaxation. This is the state of mind I am dreaming of in the cultural India of tomorrow when no author (to give an example from personal experience) would have to suffer the the fate of being told by a reader of his own class that he loves his works, but offers wrong reasons for his love, even if he can be reasonably articulate about it.

I have come to end of my submission. I plead for the restoration of intelligence to its rightful place in the world of Art, so that the balance heavily tilted now in favour of passions - some of them masquerading as virtues - is restored. I plead for Intelligence because a proper exercise of this faculty can bring about that holistic and humbling sense of perspective in which the artistic mind can make use, gainfully, of the complex and beautiful world as his raw material. It can take on as best as it can, the pull of the unconscious as also the surge towards super-conscious, the ordinary consciousness being only a thin and restless veil between these two vast layers that impinge upon it, as Swami Vivekanand tells us; can absort both the *lasya* and the *tandava* in a related pattern of beauty; and can smilingly contemplate on the joyousness of a Van Gogh "Sunflower" and the gloom of his "Patato Eaters" in an appreciation of the wonderful Earth, that must necessarily belong to both.

The truly artistic mind shorn of passions and prejudices is the

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civilised mind in the intellectual phase of its ascension. Somerset Maugham had said that "tolerance and good humour" were the prized virtues he had acquired through a life-time of writing literature. For he had realised that the benighted human species was almost the same everywhere and deserved greater understanding in a vein of sympathy. I am entirely in agreement with this highly civilised author. But I would go further. Ideally, the artist cannot rest on his flat plateau for long.

He had had intimations of immortality which he could not properly comprehend and had lost them to the rigours of the commonplace world. But with the equanimity gained by him now through his progression in the unreal world of Art he can, I suppose, pursue the logic of his intimations, and can get nearer that condition of bliss in which All is Beauty and all is Good in God's creation. When the philosopher's *Maya* is transmuted into the artist's *Leela*, and one can play with God, the supreme artist them all, as advised, ever so lovingly, by Sri Ma.

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MY WRITING, MY TIMES

A writer at the age of seventy is apt to be favoured with an indulgent smile, when he says Hamlet-like, that the times are out of joint, and it was his miserable fate that he was born to set it right. Age has its vanities, they would say, and a writer is doubly vain, thanks to his sense of self-importance. For nobody really expected him to change anything with his words – did they ? So why this holy anguish, they would ask you inwardly, wreathed in smiles.

Yet, I am prompted to say something on these lines, when I am given this rare opportunity of addressing a highly distinguished audience of writers and literateurs drawn from all over India. My only alibi is that I was entitled to certain dreams, considering the time when I was born. Kindly allow me to explain myself.

I started writing in the late thirties when the struggle for the freedom of India was at a fairly hopeful stage. The frail and elderly Mahatma, who was talking like yet another saint of India, had also shown results as a political leader. The first taste of real freedom was round the corner, for we were going to have a thing called Provincial Autonomy with our own ministers weilding all the power, while the Governors appointed by the British Govt would be mere figure-heads. I still remember the glee, almost malicious, with which I and my friend greeted the victory of the local Congress candidate in a small town in Orissa, whereas the beaten gentleman, supposed to be a minion of the British Raj –

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and –landlord class combine had spared no pains to please the electorate with feasting sessions galore, apart from the reported gifts of cash, clothings, and what have you. And how I pitied my civil servant father who could not celebrate his undoubted joy over the developments, as I did ! Just as I felt sorry for him in later years, during the war, when he took me along to sit with him quietly at a Bata shop in Cuttack, to hear Jawaharlal Nehru thundering against the British Govt at the nearest street - corner.

Another event had also happened in the meantime, which was of immense importance to me as an Oriya boy. Orissa was made into a separate province on 1st April 1936, and regained an identity that had been denied to her for so long. And we were told by our seniors, among other things, that we had nothing to fear any more about the future of Oriya language and literature. As if we had ever any doubts about if, little as we shared the subsisting fear in their minds, dating from the pioneering days of Fakirmohan Senapati, Radhanath Ray, and others, who fought, through their writings, the fantastic lie spread in some interested guarters outside Orissa, that Oriya was not a seperate language.

Provincial Autonomy became a fact within two years of the creation of Orissa as a separate province, and you can well imagine the mounting excitement of a boy who had just turned fourteen and had joined the premier college of Orissa, over the unfolding of a historic process that he was privileged to witness. It was indeed an atmosphere of hope and joy, heralding the dawn of a great new world to come. And my pretty and passionate poems about love, patriotism, and what have you, could ask for no more than a quickening of the pace, for my biological youth was also knocking on my doors around this time.

But there was a setback caused by events that we could not foresee, because we were not in a mood to do so. The Second World War that began in 1939, was followed three years later by the 'Quit India' movement, when I was eighteen, and was doing

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my post-graduate studies at Patna. I shall never forget how I had barely escaped being beaten by the British 'tommies' who were forcing us to remove the barricades on the street in front of one of our hostels, ignoring our pleas that we didn't do it. And I have the painful memory of seeing next year, with my own eyes, scores of dead bodies lying on the railway tracks and around, when I was travelling home to Orissa, during the summer holidays. They were the victims of the Great Bengal Famine, the man-made famine that the British Govt could not be bathered with, for they had better things to do, in order to win the war.

Did my romantic leanings as a writer die an early death, because my youth was blighted by these experiences, before it could take off ? I tend to dismiss it now as a romantic idea, but the fact remains that I had well and truly ceased to be romantic in my literature at the age of twenty. That was when I wrote my first short story "Parada Tale" (Off - screen), in which I had sought to bring out the strange dichatomy between how you are moved by the sufferings of the poor on the screen, whereas you ignore them, as though absent -mindedly, when you are back from the cinema hall. I remember another such story of these days captioned "Purba para" (Before and After) in which I had tried to convey a painful fact of life, that the cherished mother- love you swear by. cannot possibly subsist in the way you would like to, after you take another women into your life.

But the war came to an end soon enough, never mind the atom bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the horrors of which had not registered yet in our young minds, and Independence was again within a hailing distance. So my enthusiasm as an Indian over the shape of things to come had certainly revived, though I did feel that there was little cause for euphoria after the heavy price we had paid in blood, and the bitter divide caused by the two-nation theory, in order to gain our Independence.

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Came the year 1947, when India attained Independence. It was also a very important year in my life, when I married, and also took my first government job as Deputy Magistrate and Collector.

I was in the famous pilgrim town of Puri, the home of Lord Jagannath, as a probationary Deputy Magistrate, on the first day of Independence. The new National Flag fluttered from several roof-tops, but there were hardly any signs of popular jubiliation in the streets, which was a trible disappointing . Nevertheless I thought, keeping in with my increasingly sober outlook on life, that we have grown mature enough for such emotional displays.

But I was still a greenhorn for the bureaucratic world of make-believe and double-speak. Let me share with you an experience of those early days as a magistrate. If was Gandhi Jayanti Day in the year of our Independence, and I was asked to go to some bustees, and help promote a cleanliness drive, as was required on the occasion. I did my stint with normal enthusiasm, and thought it only fair that I should also listen to the many grievances of the people, and note them down for necessary action. But when my District Magistrate saw my report, he started chuckling like nobody's business. And I was taken by total surprise when he turned round on me, more irritated than amused by the time he had finished reading my long story, and said - "Look here, what do you mean by all this stuff ? Did I ask you to be a grievance - master ? All that we have to do is to report to the Govt that we had visited such and such bustees, and observed the Day as required of us. I hope you didn't make any commitments to them, did you ?" That was when I learnt, barely six months after holding a govt job, that what matters is how an activity of ours stands recorded in the Govt files in obedience to the current rules and orders. There is no abiding obligation to the people as a public servant. Rather it is dangerous to harbour such sentiments, for the sake of your career. That was an object - lesson that

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stayed with me, and I was reminded of it, time and again, when I had to deal with the performances of the Govts, States and Central as a member of the Indian' Audit and Accounts Service which I joined three years later, in 1950. I could no more consider the facts recorded in the Govt files as promises fulfilled, till further scrutiny, never mind the completion certificates, statements of expenditure, etc.

I do not wish to impose on my distinguished audience the story of my life as civil servant, or even as a private citizen. But I thought it would be useful to throw some light into my formative years, till I turned therty. For it was about that time that I started writing furiously, much more prose than poetry, and mostly short stories, focussing on the strangeness of things, in terms of the divide between appearance and reality, in all kinds of personal, inter-personal, and social situations. And so it would be in order to consider whether the core of my writings has been shaped by what happened to my perceptions during those years - the times being what they were. It would be foolish of me to relate the two by way of cause and effect, but I thought I should put them down in broad detail, as a relevant exercise, for the purpose of the given discourse.

The grand killings in the wake of Partition and the assassination of the Mahatma were behind me by the time I was thirty. And the People of India had given unto themselves a new Constitution in uplifting words, and more words, wedded to the values of liberty, equality, fraternity, and social justice. So I had every reason to feel that I had also a role to play, both as writer and civil servant in the flowering of a new democracy, properly modern in its outlook and yet proud of its ancient past. Was I being a little too presumptuous ? The thought had never occurred to me.

Then there have been these long years of what I have seen around me all over India, in places that include Calcutta, Delhi, Madras, Gauhati and a host of other places where I functioned

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as an officer of the Indian Audits and Accounts Service, with spells, in between, in the United States of America, and Southern Africa. Long respectable years which I would neverthless consider as a vast plateau, that did not have the means to affect and alter, in any significant way, the perceptions which had been planted in me during the earlier years. Apart from the normal process of growth from youth to middle age, and to the mellow evening of life I am passing through now, which carries its own logic of the mind, I must say unequivocally that these years have not been half so exciting as the ones I had left behind. True, there have been three half-baked wars with Pakistan, the short burst of a humiliating war with China, and more assassinations of leaders, including Prime Ministers, during this period, but there has been no ascent which would leave one breathless in spasms of hope and fear, and no new dreams to create. On the other hand there has been a perceptible decline in the quality of life, inspite of the charts of material growth. That is, I am afraid, a conclusion I have not been able to escape.

The divide between appearence and reality which I had found in life, by way of an intellectual exercise, has thus grown into a chasm over these years, and has ceased to amuse me. And I have often wondered if it could have been otherwise.

Could it have been different if I had not seen the ugly face of poverty as in Calcutta, to the strains of mellifluous Rabindrasangeet ? Could it have been otherwise if I had not noticed so many hypocrisies in the high society of Delhi ? Or were my writings influenced by the position I held in my official career as a financial policeman who had come across so many reports of performance which were not worth the paper they were written on – like huge amounts spent on road development in a certain area for non-existent roads or for "roads leading from nowhere to nowhere", as the concerned public Accounts Committee had put it, beautifully ? Or is it that I could not take in my stride, like

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many of my fellow-men, the spiralling corruption in publice life which has covered the entire body-politic by now, so much so that honesty, when noticed, is rare enough to be discounted as showmanship or motivated towards larger gains ?

What is worse, all this combines with self-serving nations of private morality which are supposed to be uniquely Indian, rooted in ancient culture. Marital bonds in our society are still considered sacrosanct and divorces are frowned upon, never mind the clandestine affairs, while we merrily burn our brides if they don't bring enough dowry with them - a 'progression' from the days when they could only be driven to suicide ! And faint stirrings of conscience when we indulge in bribes, nepotism, and the like, are easily silenced on considerations of our duty to the family, caste, or community. In other words, the steady erosion of public morality is helped, more often then not, by private morality, so-called, and the contradictions are not worth a moment's thuoght for the average Indian. It is any wonder that the writer John resters had characterised us once as 'sanctimonious humbugs' ?

The divides have obsessed me, an unkind critic is apt to say, and I cannot but plead guilty to the charge. The dark shadows, not necessarily in the philosophic parlance of T.S. Eliot, that fall between thought and action, conscious thought and unconscious motivation, protestations of love and the enjoyment of common sex, the romantic image of poverty and the benigh apathy with which we treat the poor, etc. etc. The list is endless, and I have done no more than trying to convey, variously, the painfully black humour contained in the situation. In a tone of gentle irony when I am amused, and in a not so - gentle manner, termed by a crific as 'devastating' when I am not. And with heavy doses of sarcasm when I am angry, and could not care less for artistic subtleties.

Thus, for example, I have come down heavy in my stories on a well-to-do young man who seeks to patronise his poor classmate of the past for the sake of friendship; on the pontifical freedom

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- fighter who plies a sympathetic newly-arrived adminstrator with a long lecture on how the will to take nation forword has all but vanished these days, and secures, in the process, a promise of employment for his son to do the right thing for the nation; a petite-bourgeoise 'revolutionary' of Calcutta who seeks to save his skin in an impending clash with the police through the grace of a car-borne capitalist whom he hates all the time, but is dazzled by the elegance and apulence at his home, including the charms of his sister-in-law, and swears to be like him some day so he can lead the proletariat to victory; the pitiable bureaucrat who wants to steer clear of the war of ideologies, and dies a moral death in the manner of a mongrel fitch killed in the crossfire between two warring groups in his locality..so on and so forth.

I have not spared the individual man either, as distinguished from the social man. A young widow disconsolate over the death of her baby son, and hating the talk of replacement, God willing, by another child, yields nevertheless to the sexual overturns of her husband at the earliest opportunity. A self-proclaimed intellectual, who does not believe in God, indulges in a passing thought at a certain moment of crisis, that between two children who are critically ill at about the some time - his son and his friend's daughter - one was bound to die so the other could live, and it's better the girl dies as her father, a religious person can absorb the shock better. A husband properly solicitous of his dull and ailing wife is happy in the feminine company of another kind, but is vain enough not to realise the fact, even when the wife points it out to him jestingly, but bravely battling against unshed tears.

But I have not been pessimistic. Merciless as I have been in exposing the inner man who is oblivious of or ignores the 'divides' which would have troubled him if he were a sensitive person capable of some intellection , I have also tried my best to note his urges, after unclear and inarticulate, towardsf a higher life.

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For I am at one with Swami Vivekananda that human consciousness is but a thin veil that divides a vast underground of the unconscious from enormous resources of the superconsicious, and relatively rare as the experience may be, he cannot entirely escape the forces that tend to move him upwards. Thus my 'atheist' protagonist, who is struck by the unholy thought of wishing the death of his friends's daughter, is also privy to the thought that assails him the next moment, that he is alienated from this world, a rank outsider, and godless indeed in a larger sense of the term. And a bunch of noisy and truant students from the suburbs of Calcutta, apparently amoral if not vicious in their way of life, are nevertheless moved to action, illegal as it may be, to relieve the distress of a handicapped fellow-student. Incidentally this story has been translated and published in various Indian languages, as also in English, Spanish, and Arabic.

Nor have I been judgemental in my authorial statements overt or implied, particularly in my later years, knowing how vulnerable a person can be with the complexities of his mind, which plague him with mixed motivations, compelling him to do wrong things with the best of intentions. In situations which would provoke a latter-day Christ to pray for their souls and say - 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing !'

I grant all this and more. As Camus would say, the very act of writing is an affermation that all is not lost. And do I not write regularly, even at this age and at this point of time, hopelessly out of joint as I consider it to be ?

Sometimes I tell myself that a writer is the product of his times only in a very superficial sense. Essentially he must rise above the medioarty of his times which seeks to be conservative for the sake of social stability, while the writer with his perceived truths derived from a superior intelligence and sensitivity could not care less for the said virtue. Also have I not been writing

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basically, for my own personal salvation ? So why should I worry that I haven't, in the process, done some good to the society ? Does it have to be both "आत्मनः मोक्षार्थं" and "जगद्हिताय चः"? Could't I do with one, and forget about the other ?

Or may be I am, after all, a parasite of the governing elite, in the words of Sartre, who moves in opposition to the interests of those who keep him alive. Not a very ennobling thought. But if this is the original conflict that defines the condition of the writer, is it not foolish of me to lament that the world is out of joint, etc ?

I am not one who had begun writing with a sense of missionary zeal that is would go some way to improve the world. I believe in artistic integrity above all, and in giving artistic expression to my perceived truths with, the utmost honesty. Yet I had hoped, forgive me, that my writings along with those of many others who had started writing at one of the finest hours in the history of the nation when dreams were legitimate, would have helped towards a certain heightened awareness of the self and the society in their true perspectives, and the dreams would at last have stayed with us, if not transformed into realities which would do us proud. I had never imagined that I would live to see the dreams wither away, being replaced by anxieties that negate literature. That is my only regret.

I only hope that my grandchildren or their successors glorying in some brave and beautiful world will prove me wrong, and some of them will write better literature, married as it would be to a more abiding faith in man and his world.

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Kishori Charan Das *(b. 1924)* is an eminent bilingual writer from Orissa who writes short stories, novels, poems, and essays, with a penchant for short stories. He has so far published : Oriya - a] 3 novels, b] 14 collections of short stories, c] 4 collections of essays, d] 1 collection of poems, and e] translation of an award-winning novel from English to Oriya; and English - a] 4 collections of short stories and b] 1 collection of poems. Many of his short stories have been translated into English, French, Spanish, Arabic, and several Indian languages, and have featured in a number of journals and anthologies, including there brought out by penguin books, U K, Sahitya Akademi, Jnan Pith, National Book Trust of India, Indian Council of cultural Relations Times of India B.R. Publishing corporation, and Vikas. Among several awards and honours received by him the must important are : a] *Sahitya Akademi 1976*, b] *Orissa Sahitya Akademi Award 1976*, c] *Sarala Award 1986*, and d] *Bishuv Award, 1992*. He was a member of Indian Audit and Accounts service and lives now in retirement at Cuttack.

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